The SUBMARINE·BOYS' LIGHTNING·CRUISE

VICTOR G. DURHAM

THE SUBMARINE BOYS SERIES

To Jon July 4, 1914
from Uncle Dennis

CHS-57c

Junior Jenkins

1914

Boo-oom!

Frontispiece.

The Submarine Boys' Lightning Cruise

OR

The Young Kings of the Deep

By

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Illustrated

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The Submarine Boys' Lightning Cruise

CHAPTER I

WHY THE "DANGER" SIGN WAS UP

"DANGER!"

That sign might have been over an air-hole in the ice; or it might have been near rapidly moving shafting and belting in a factory.

As a matter of fact, the letters, white against the red paint on the door of the shed, meant danger in the most terrible form. It was the sort of danger, which, defied too far, would send one traveling skyward.

The shed stood in a lonely corner of the big Farnum shipbuilding yards at Dunhaven. Now, it was the Farnum yard in which the Pollard submarine boats were built, and this shed contained some two dozen Whitehead submarine torpedoes, each with its fearful load of two hundred pounds of that dread high explosive, guncotton.

It was in the month of February, and the day, at this seacoast point, was cold and blustery, when two boys of seventeen, each in natty blue uniforms and caps resembling those worn by naval officers, crossed the yard toward the shed. Over their uniforms both boys wore heavy, padded blue ulsters, also of naval pattern.

"Danger?" laughed young Captain Jack Benson, stopping before the door and fumbling for the key. "Well, I should say so!"

"Something like two tons and a half of gun-cotton in this old shed," smiled Hal Hastings. "That's not mentioning some other high explosives."

"It's this gun-cotton that begins to make our calling in life look like a really dangerous one," muttered Jack, as he produced the key and fitted it into the lock.

"Once upon a time," murmured Hal, "we thought there was sufficient danger, just in going out on the ocean in a submarine torpedo craft, and diving below the surface."

"Yet we found that submarine travel wasn't really dangerous," pursued Captain Jack. "Really, riding around in a submarine craft seems as safe, and twice as pleasant, as cruising in any other kind of yacht."

"After we've gotten more used to having hundreds of pounds of gun-cotton on board," smiled

Hal, "I don't suppose we'll ever think of the danger in that stuff, either."

Jack unlocked the door, swinging it open. Then both young men passed inside the red shed.

It needed hardly more than a glance, from an observing person, to make certain that neither boy was likely to be much bothered by any ordinary form of danger.

For a number of months, now, Jack Benson and Hal Hastings had lived all but continually aboard submarine torpedo boats. They had operated such craft, when awake, and had dreamed of doing it when asleep. Being youths of intense natures, and unusually quick to learn, they had long before qualified as experts in handling submarine craft.

They had yet, however, one thing to learn practically. It needs the deadly torpedo, fired below the water, and traveling under the surface, to make the torpedo boat the greatest of all dangers that menace the haughty battleship of a modern navy.

Now, at last, Captain Jack Benson, together with his engineer, Hal Hastings, and Eph Somers, another young member of the crew, were about to have their first practical drill with the actual torpedo. An officer of the United States Navy, especially detailed for the work, was expected hourly at Dunhaven. The three subma-

rine boys were eager for their first taste of this work. Barely less interested were Jacob Farnum, shipbuilder, and president of the submarine company, and David Pollard, inventor of the Pollard type of submarine craft.

In this shed, placed on racks in three tiers, lay the two dozen Whitehead torpedoes with which the first work was to be done. As Jack stepped about the shed, looking to see that everything was in order, he was thinking of the exciting work soon to come.

Eph Somers was near at hand, though up in the village at that particular moment. There was a fourth member of the crew, however, named Williamson. He was a grown man, a machinist who had been long in Farnum's employ, and who was considered a most valuable hand to have in the engine room of a submarine.

Williamson, during the preceding fortnight, had been away in the interior of the country. He had taken a midwinter vacation, and had gone to visit his mother. Now, however, the machinist knew of the work at hand, and his return was expected.

"Really," declared Jack, turning around to his chum, "Williamson ought to be here not later than to-morrow morning. He had Mr. Farnum's letter in good season."

At this moment a heavy tread was heard on

the light crust of snow outside. Then a man's head appeared in the doorway.

"Speaking of angels!" laughed Hal.

"Williamson, I'm mighty glad to see you back," hailed Captain Jack, delightedly.

"I'm glad to be back, if there's anything unusual going to happen," replied the machinist, as they shook hands all around. Then, as they fell to chatting, the machinist seated himself on a keg, the top of which was about half off, revealing, underneath, a layer of jute bagging.

"We're going to have some great practice work," declared Hal, moving about. "We're just waiting for that Navy man, and then we're going out on the new submarine—the one that's named after me, you know."

Out in the little harbor beyond rode at anchor two grim-looking little torpedo boats, each about one hundred and ten feet long. The older one was named the "Benson," after Captain Jack. But the latest one to be launched, which had had its full trial trip only some few days before, bore the name of "Hastings" after the capable young chief engineer of the Pollard boats.

Both of the boys, by this time, happened to be looking away from the machinist. Williamson, in utter unconcern, drew a pipe out of one of his pockets, filled it, and stuck the stem between

his lips. Next, he struck a safety match, softly, against the side of the match-box, and lighted his pipe, drawing in great whiffs.

"Just how far does this practice go?" inquired the machinist, still sitting on the keg and smoking contentedly.

At that moment Captain Jack Benson caught, in his nostrils, the scent of burning tobacco.

In an instant a steely glitter shone in the young captain's eyes. Firm, strong lines appeared about his mouth. All that part of the face showed white and pallid. Just a second or two later Hal Hastings also turned. Like a flash his lower jaw dropped, as though the hinge thereof had broken.

When Captain Jack's voice came to him it sounded low, yet hard and metallic. One would have wondered whether he had suddenly become ugly.

"Williamson," he directed, "just step outside and see if Eph is there?"

Hardly noting the unusual ring in the young commander's voice, the machinist, still with the pipe-stem between his teeth, rose and walked out into the open. With an almost inarticulate yell Captain Jack Benson leaped after him, striking the man in the back and sending him spinning a dozen feet beyond.

Hal Hastings, too, dashed through the door-

way; then paused, grasping the edge of the door and shutting it with a bang.

"What on earth do you mean by knocking a fellow down like that?" demanded the machinist, angrily, leaping to his feet and wheeling about, leaving the lighted pipe on the snow-crust.

"Look at the sign on this door," ordered Hal Hastings, pointing to the big white letters.

"Danger, eh?" asked Williamson, speaking more quietly. "Well, that door was open and swung back when I came along, so I couldn't see any warning. But what is there in the shed that's so mighty dangerous?"

"What do you suppose is in the half-open keg that you were sitting on?" demanded Captain Jack, rather hoarsely.

"What?" queried the machinist, curiously.

"The head of that keg is half off," Jack continued. "Now, if any sparks from your pipe had dropped down and set the bagging afire—well, that keg is almost full of cubes of gun-cotton!"

"Whew!" gasped Williamson, beginning to look pallid himself.

"Nor is that all," Hal took up. "Of course, if you had touched off that gun-cotton in the keg, it would have sent us all through the roof. But the smaller explosion would have touched

off the two tons and a half of gun-cotton in those Whitehead torpedoes. That would have laid the whole shipyard flat. In fact, after the torpedoes went up, there wouldn't have been much left of any part of Dunhaven!"

"Gr—great Hercules!" gasped the machinist, his face now losing every vestige of color.

Then, after a moment:

"With so much sky-high trouble stored in that shed, you should have a sign up."

"There is one, on the door," replied Captain Jack. "But the door happened to be swung open, so that you couldn't see it. Yet I guess you're the only one in all Dunhaven who didn't know what the shed contains."

"And how does the little town like the idea?" demanded Williamson, beginning to smile as his color slowly returned.

"Why, the people can't expect to have very much to say," Jack replied. "We have a permit to store the explosive, and it's at the request of the United States Government. You're not afraid to be near so much rockety stuff are you?"

Williamson gazed at the young skipper reproachfully.

"Now, what have I ever done, Captain, or what have I failed to do, that should make you think me only forty per cent. good on nerve?

Though I'll admit that my appetite for smoking won't be good when I'm near this shed. How long is the stuff going to stay here? That is, if some idiot doesn't play with matches in that shed?"

"I expect it will about all be used, after the Navy officer gets on the scene, and drills us in using torpedoes," Captain Benson answered. "It isn't intended to keep that sort of stuff stored here all the time."

"Oh! Then I reckon I won't toss my job into the harbor," grinned the machinist. "How soon are you going to want me?"

"You can go aboard the 'Hastings' at once," replied Skipper Jack. "It won't do any harm to have the machinery of the new boat looked over with a most critical eye."

"Any gun-cotton, rack-a-rock wool or dynamite silk stored on board the new craft?" inquired Williamson, with a look of mock anxiety.

"Nothing more dangerous than gasoline," Captain Jack smiled.

"Oh, I don't mind that stuff," chuckled the machinist. "I want a smoke. That's why I'm particular about not going to work near any stuff that has such a big idea of itself that it swells up every time a match or a lighted pipe comes around. I'll go aboard now."

With this statement, Williamson strolled down

to the beach, untying a small skiff and pulling himself out to the newer of the pair of very capable submarine torpedo boats that lay at moorings out in the little private harbor.

Hal, in the meantime, had quietly swung the shed door to and locked it. The great white word, "Danger," was once more in plain view.

"What are you going to do now?" asked young Hastings of his chum.

"I reckon I'll spend my time wondering where the Navy man is," laughed Captain Jack.

"Let's go up to the office, then. Mr. Farnum may have had some word in the matter."

As they neared the door of the office building, Eph Somers, who was a combination of first officer, steward and general utility man on board the Pollard boats, came in through the gate, joining his friends at once.

Readers of our previous volumes are now well acquainted with these young men and their friends. In "The Submarine Boys on Duty" was told how Jack and Hal came to Dunhaven at just the right moment, as it happened, to edge their way into the employ of Jacob Farnum, the young shipbuilder, who was then engaged in the construction of the first of those famous submarine torpedo craft. The first boat was named the "Pollard," after David Pollard, the inventor of the craft and of its successors.

By the time that the "Pollard" was ready for launching Jack and Hal had made themselves so valuable to their employer that the boys were allowed to take to the water with the boat when it left the stocks. Eph Somers, freckle-faced and "sunny"-haired, was a Dunhaven boy who had fairly won his way aboard the same craft by his many sided ability. Yet, under the direction of Messrs. Farnum and Pollard these youngsters so rapidly acquired the difficult knack of handling submarine boats that they remained aboard. In the end Jack Benson became the recognized captain of the boat. Some notable cruises were made, in which the great value of the Pollard type of submarines was splendidly proved, thanks largely to the cleverness of the boys who handled her.

The "Pollard" was present during naval manœuvres of a fleet of United States warships. Captain Jack conceived and carried out a most laughable trick against one of the battleships, which attracted public attention generally to this new craft.

In the second volume of the series, "The Submarine Boys' Trial Trip," our readers found the young men engaged in giving further and much more startling demonstration to naval officers of the full value of the Pollard type of boat. Incidentally, it was told how a grasping

financier attempted to get control of the Farnum shipyard and its submarine business, with a series of startling plots that the submarine boys were instrumental in balking. The submarine boat itself passed some of the severest trials that could be invented, yet the trials through which the builders and the submarine boys passed were far greater. Yet, in the end, just as Mr. Farnum and his associates were about to go to the wall, financially, the Navy Department purchased and paid for the "Pollard." In this volume was also told how Jack and his friends were the first to discover a simple, yet seemingly mysterious, method of leaving and entering a submarine boat at will when it lay on the bottom of the ocean.

Then, in "The Submarine Boys and the Middies," was related how Captain Jack and his chums secured the prize detail of going to Annapolis with the company's new boat, the "Farnum," there to teach the midshipmen of the Naval Academy how to operate boats of this class. That narrative was unusually full of adventures, including the laughable recital of how Eph innocently brought down upon the trio a first-class sample of hazing by Uncle Sam's naval cadets. Captain Jack had many startling adventures with the secret agent of a rival submarine company, who sought to discredit and

disgrace the young commander of the submarine boys.

In the volume preceding this, entitled "The Submarine Boys and the Spies," the third of the company's boats, the "Benson," named in honor of the young captain, was discovered in Florida waters. This newest submarine had been sent to Spruce Beach, in December, to undergo some tests and to give an exhibition, the U. S. gunboat, "Waverly" being on hand to act as host. In this volume it was related how Captain Jack's very life was at stake, from the foreign spies gathered at Spruce Beach to pry into the secrets of the mysterious submarine. Here the United States Secret Service officers were called in to aid, yet it was Captain Jack and his friends who contributed to the full success of the government sleuths. At this period of his career Captain Jack's greatest dangers came through the wiles of charming women spies, especially one beautiful young Russian woman, Mlle. Sara Nadiboff, easily the most clever of all international spies. Yet the cleverness of the submarine boys carried them successfully, and with highest honor, through the gravest situations in their eventful, young careers.

Just at this particular time the young men had been going through dull days. Beyond the fact of the mere presence of the heavily charged

torpedoes at the shipyard there had been nothing like excitement, for some time. This dulness, however, was destined to turn, suddenly, into the most intense and exciting activity.

As Jack pushed open the outer door of the office building of the shipyard, Jacob Farnum, the owner, happened to be bustling through the corridor.

"Hallo, boys!" came his quick, cheery greeting. "I was just about to send for you."

"Any word," queried Jack, good-humoredly, "as to when that cold-molasses naval officer is going to be here?"

From within the office sounded a light laugh.

"You'll see him shortly," grinned Mr. Farnum. "But come in, boys."

As the three submarine boys entered the office, in a group, their glances fell upon two men, in the uniform of United States sailors, standing at ease near the door. In a chair near Mr. Farnum's desk sat a third man, dressed in ordinary citizen attire. He was a man of about twenty-eight, dark, smooth-faced, slender of figure, yet broad-shouldered.

"Lieutenant Danvers," called Mr. Farnum, smiling broadly, "I want to present my submarine boys to you. First of all, Jack Benson, our young captain."

Realizing that his question had been over-

heard, Jack went forward with a very red face, holding out his hand. With a quiet smile, Lieutenant Frank Danvers, U. S. Navy, took the boy's hand. Then Hal and Eph were presented.

"I see that I was mistaken about the molasses," laughed Jack.

"Nothing as sweet as all that about the Navy, eh?" smiled Mr. Danvers. "However, my delay in getting here was due entirely to delay in official orders. I am now on the ground, however, and ready for prompt——"

At this moment the outer door shot open with a bang. Hal looked out into the corridor to see what had caused the disturbance.

"Look a-here!" sounded the voice of machinist Williamson, in an injured tone. "Here I am, looking about for a quiet place for a five minutes' smoke. Captain Benson sends me out to the 'Hastings,' telling me that it will be all right there. So I light my pipe on the platform deck and go below. Great Jehosh! The first thing I run on to is a couple of torpedoes, about a mile long and two hundred yards thick, loaded up with gun-cotton or pistol-satin enough to blow the ocean up into the sky. And I haven't had my smoke yet!"

"That's all right," called Hal, quietly, as the machinist's somewhat shaking voice died out. "You're always safe, man, in following any lead

that Captain Jack Benson gives you. Go back on the 'Hastings' and have your smoke out."

"But those two torpedoes, loaded up to the muzzles with artillery-felt, or some other exploding kind of dry-goods?" protested the machinist.

"Those two torpedoes are dummies," laughed Hal Hastings. "They're aboard just for dummy torpedo practice. There isn't a kick in a dozen of 'em. Go back and get your smoke, man!"

Hal must have looked at the machinist with unusual sharpness, for Williamson went promptly out through the door, closing it after him.

"I'm ready to go aboard, Mr. Benson," proposed Lieutenant Danvers, "and make a start whenever you're so inclined."

"We'd better put it off for half an hour," proposed Skipper Jack, with a laugh. "That'll give Williamson a chance to have that smoke of his over with."

"That'll suit me," agreed the naval officer, cheerfully. "In fact, Mr. Benson, if you won't think me too much like cold molasses"—Jack winced—"I would propose that we start at a little after one o'clock this afternoon. Even at that, we'll be out long enough between that time and dark."

"Any arrangement that suits you, Lieutenant, suits me," nodded Jack Benson. "You're going with us to-day, aren't you, Mr. Farnum?"

"Don't you believe, for a moment," retorted the shipbuilder, "that I'd let anything keep me from the first torpedo practice on one of our boats. And I'm almost ashamed of Dave Pollard. That fellow, instead of being here, is away somewhere in hiding, dreaming about a new style of clutch for the after end of the torpedo tube. Oh, yes, I'll be with you!"

"Hallo!" muttered Eph, stepping to a window that looked out on the yard near the street gate. "What's this coming? A hundred people, at least, and they look like a mob!"

There was, in truth, a goodly inpouring of people, and fully a dozen of these new-comers seemed to be trying to talk at the same time.

CHAPTER II

TORPEDO PRACTICE AT LAST

"PERHAPS they're coming to make a row about having so much gun-cotton stored close to the village," hinted Lieutenant Danvers.

The same thought was in Captain Jack Benson's mind. However, they were not long to be

kept in doubt, for Jacob Farnum had moved hastily to the outer door.

"Good day, friends!" called the shipbuilder, as he pulled the outer door open, for he recognized most of the faces of men and women in the crowd. "What's wrong, friends?"

At the very doorstep the leaders of the crowd halted.

"The 'Mary Bond' isn't in yet, Mr. Farnum," called one of the men.

That was the name of a fishing smack that put out from Dunhaven at regular intervals through the winter. She carried a Dunhaven captain and mate, and, altogether, fourteen men and boys.

"When should she have been in?" queried Mr. Farnum. The crowd had halted, now, and all but their chosen speaker remained silent.

"Yesterday morning, sir," replied the spokesman.

"Do you people fear that harm has come to the 'Mary Bond'?" queried the shipbuilder.

"Why, it must be so, sir. For the smack wasn't due to go out more'n some forty miles. With the winds we've been having lately she could come in, any time, within a few hours."

"Perhaps the captain had a poor run of luck," suggested Mr. Farnum. "He may be staying out longer than usual."

"No, sir; for all the reports that have come in off the sea are of big catches. The ocean has been swarming with fish these last few days," replied the spokesman.

"Then, friends, I take it there's something you want me to do. What is it?" demanded Jacob Farnum.

"We've come to ask you, sir, if you won't have one of your torpedo boats put out and look for the 'Mary Bond.' Your boats can go a big distance in a few hours. We're afraid, Mr. Farnum, that the smack's canvas or sticks may have suffered in the big blow of yesterday. We're afraid, too, that the 'Mary Bond' may be drifting about helplessly on the sea, just for the need of a little aid. We're afraid, sir, that good Dunhaven men may be in great danger of going to the bottom, and leaving behind families that——"

The spokesman stopped, a little choke in his voice. As though in answer sobs came from some of the women.

"Now, now, friends, if that's the trouble, we'll soon know about it," promised the shipbuilder, one of the biggest-hearted men living. "One of our boats is going out for practice. But, if you'll supply a good sea-going hand or two, the second boat shall go out and sweep the seas hereabouts, looking for the 'Mary Bond.'"

A cheer went up at once. Mr. Farnum flushed with pleasure. Not above doing a kind act, he also enjoyed having it appreciated.

"Who'll command the relief boat?" called one of the women. "Jack Benson?"

"No," replied Mr. Farnum, shaking his head. "Captain Benson must go out on naval business to-day."

A murmur of disappointment went up from the crowd. Jack Benson was a young skipper on whose success a Dunhaven crowd would make bets.

"But, see here," proposed the shipbuilder, "I'll go out myself, on the 'Benson,' and take Williamson along with me. Now, you folks find any local salt-water captain and a couple of good deck hands to go with me."

"When will you start, sir?" asked the spokesman.

"The minute you have my helpers ready. There's Captain Allen among you now. If he'll go, he's as good a salt-water dog as I want on a cruise with me. Let him pick two sailors out of the crowd. We can start in five minutes."

Another cheer went up as Jacob Farnum, leaving the outer door open, hurried back to his own party. Captain Allen, a retired master of coasting vessels, had five times as many volunteers in the crowd as he needed.

"Jack, I'm sorry I can't go with you," sighed Mr. Farnum, as he returned. "But the call of humanity is too big a one. I'm going to take Williamson with me. The rest of you go with Lieutenant Danvers and his men. I'll hope to be able to go with you to-morrow, anyway."

"Isn't there a tug hereabouts that those people could hire?" questioned the naval officer.

"Oh, yes; there's a small one to the south of here, but her captain would charge at least fifty dollars a day," replied the shipbuilder, as he drew on a heavy deck ulster.

"I suppose these people expect you to go out for nothing," hinted Lieutenant Danvers.

"Oh, yes, of course," nodded the shipbuilder. "But one can't be a crank, or a miser, when women are red-eyed and weeping from worry over their missing husbands and sons."

There was a suspicion of moisture in Mr. Farnum's own eyes as he snatched up a cap, bidding his own party a hasty good-bye ere he ran from the office.

"There goes a good-natured man," laughed Lieutenant Danvers.

"A big-hearted one, you mean, sir," corrected Captain Jack Benson. "He's a man with a heart bigger than any torpedo craft he could possibly build and launch."

"I wish him all luck," said the naval officer,

heartily. "And that crowd, and also the poor seafaring men that put out in the like of the 'Mary Bond.'"

The crowd had gone from the office building, now, following Mr. Farnum and his volunteers down to the little harbor. Jack, his chums and the naval party slowly followed down to the water front.

Little time did the shipbuilder lose in getting under way. A rousing cheer ascended when the grim little "Benson" slipped her moorings and turned her nose out toward the sea.

"Your pipe-hungry machinist went on that craft, didn't he?" asked the naval officer, as the crowd began to turn back from the beach.

"Yes," nodded Captain Jack. "So there's nothing at all to prevent our getting the 'Hastings' out on the wave as soon as you like."

"I'm going to send my men up to the hotel, first, for a jolly big feed," proposed Lieutenant Danvers. "They've been on the rail, eating on the jump, and now they'll appreciate a good square meal."

"Suppose we all go up to the hotel for luncheon?" proposed Captain Jack.

"Then how about having torpedoes aboard when we return?"

"How many real torpedoes will you want for to-day, Mr. Danvers?" Benson inquired.

"Two, besides the dummies, will be plenty."

"Then I'll run over to Mr. Partridge, the superintendent of the yard, and he'll have a foreman and a gang attend to it," suggested the young submarine skipper.

Accordingly, this was done. Then the party slated for the afternoon cruise went over to the hotel. By the time that they came back from the midday meal the two service torpedoes were aboard the "Hastings" and the target was in readiness to be towed out to sea.

This "target" was not a handsome-looking affair. It was an old scow, some thirty feet long and broad of beam, that had once been used, up the coast, in sea-wall construction work. Mr. Farnum had bought it a short time before and it now lay at anchor, near the beach, ready to be towed out to sea for its last service to mankind. The scow was heavily laden with rock, this being intended to sink the craft's keel as far as was advisable. The old scow had now something more than four feet draught, with less than two feet of freeboard.

Two of the workmen, in an old whaleboat, waited to row the party out to the "Hastings." Jack was soon able to welcome Lieutenant Danvers on board the submarine.

"You can look around all you want, Ewald and Biffens," suggested Mr. Danvers, "and see

if you can find any great differences between this craft and the 'Pollard' and the 'Farnum.' "

The two sailors, accordingly, made themselves wholly at home in the interior of the submarine.

"Both men have put in tours of duty on the first two boats turned out by your company," explained the officer. "They know all about the two Pollard boats that the Navy bought."

"Then they won't find very much that is different on board the 'Hastings,' " Jack replied. "All that is new here is in the way of a few more up-to-date little mechanisms and devices. A man used to running the old 'Pollard' would really be wholly at home here."

A few minutes, only, were allowed for inspection of the newest submarine of the lot. By this time the workmen in the small boat had made fast a towing hawser between the bow of the old scow and the stern towing bitts of the "Hastings."

"Use my men all you need to, in casting off, or in boat handling generally," requested Lieutenant Danvers. Jack therefore ordered Ewald and Biffens forward on the upper hull to cast loose from moorings. Hal stood the trick in the engine-room, while Jack himself sat at the wheel in the tower.

In another minute, despite her rather heavy

tow, the "Hastings" was nosing briskly out of the harbor. The gasoline engines of this little craft were of a "heavy service" pattern, which adapted the submarine to the work of towing at need.

"How far out do you want to go, sir?" asked Captain Jack, as the Navy lieutenant took a seat beside him in the tower, after Eph and the sailors had gone below.

"We want to be sure to be well out of the path of coastwise vessels," replied Danvers. "That's the main thing, you know. We can't take any risk of sinking a merchantman while we're having our fun."

"With this tow, then, it will be three o'clock before we get out where we really ought to be, sir."

"That will give us at least two hours of good daylight," nodded Mr. Danvers. "Of course you know this coast well enough to pick your way back after dark?"

"I'd run the craft five times the distance, under water, and hit the harbor without thought of an accident," spoke young Benson, seriously, and with no thought of boasting.

"Jove, my young friend, if you can do a thing like that, you're a genius at the work," muttered Danvers, after a swift, side glance at Skipper Jack.

"I've done as much before," laughed Jack. "Either of my friends could do it, for that matter."

"Then you're veritable young kings of the deep!" declared Lieutenant Danvers, heartily.

"Oh, we're not wonders," smiled Jack, good-humoredly; then added, more seriously, "If we really do anything worth while, my friends and I, we're to be regarded simply as the products of constant practice."

"You're modest enough about it," agreed Danvers.

Presently, the naval officer himself took a hand at managing the submarine. Jack, knowing that the boat was in fine professional hands, slipped unconcernedly below, to chat with Hal Hastings, who sat doggedly by his engines.

"What's the matter? What makes you look so solemn, old fellow?" asked the young submarine skipper, when he caught sight of his chum's solemn face.

"Oh, you'd laugh, if I told you," smiled Hal.

"Seeing omens of ill again?" persisted young Benson.

"I suppose," sighed Hal, "well, I have a sort of premonition."

"Pre—premo——" stuttered Captain Jack, holding comically to the port side of his jaw. "Oh, pshaw! Call it a plain United States

'hunch.' What's the tip the spooks are giving you, anyway, Hal?"

Hastings smiled again, though he went on:

"Oh, it's just a queer sort of notion I have that something is going to happen to us this afternoon."

"Right-o," drawled Jack. "You don't have to shove off from that, Hal. Something is going to happen to us. This afternoon we're going to have the first drill in the actual firing of submarine torpedoes."

"Oh, I know that," Hastings admitted, quickly. "But what I see ahead, or feel as though I see, is some kind of disaster. Now, you'll think I'm a sailor-croaker, won't you, Jack?"

"Disaster?" repeated Jack, slowly. "Well, to be sure, we've the outfit on board for a disaster, if we wanted one. Two real torpedoes that hold, between them, four hundred pounds of gun-cotton—or danger-calico, as Williamson would call it. But cheer up, old fellow. There's no danger, after all. Williamson and his pipe are on the other boat."

"Oh, of course nothing is really going to happen," laughed Hal. "It is just the feeling that is over me. That's all."

It was fully three o'clock by the time Lieutenant Danvers decided they were far enough

out to sea, and far enough from any craft in those waters. Not a stick or a stack of another vessel showed within ten miles of them. The scow was accordingly cast loose and allowed to drift.

Captain Jack was at the tower wheel again, as Eph and the two sailors returned from setting the scow loose.

"We've got to be sure to record one good hit against that old barge of stone," muttered Lieutenant Danvers, who stood beside the youthful submarine commander. "The sea is roughening, and I doubt if we could pick up that scow in tow again. We've got to destroy her, or she'd be a fearful menace to navigation, drifting about in the night in the path of incoming vessels."

"Oh, I guess you'll get rid of her easily enough," spoke Jack, confidently. "You're a professional at this business, sir."

"So are the two men with me," nodded the officer. "By the way, Ewald can just as well come on deck and take the wheel, if you want him to do so. Then you can go below and see all that we do with a torpedo."

"Now, that's what I call a great idea," cried Benson, enthusiastically. "I want to know just how a torpedo is handled at the time of firing."

"It's the only thing you have left to learn

about this business," smiled the naval officer. Then he passed the word for Ewald. When that sailor had taken the wheel, the naval officer and the young submarine skipper went below.

"We'll swing in one of the dummy torpedoes, first, of course," announced Mr. Danvers.

One of the dummies was, therefore, hauled forward on a truck, then forced on into the torpedo tube. Jack watched, intently, this part of the business.

The torpedo itself was a cigar-shaped affair, with a propeller at the after end. This propeller was set in motion by means of an engine in the after part of the torpedo, the engine being so constructed that it was set in operation at the moment the torpedo left the tube and entered the ocean outside. The propeller was fitted with apparatus that would drive the torpedo in a straight line.

"The torpedo looks like a miniature submarine, doesn't it?" muttered young Benson.

"It surely does," nodded the naval officer. "And, since the torpedo has to travel under water, what better model could have been chosen? Now, the engines in these dummy torpedoes can be set for two, four, six or eight hundred yards, and the torpedo, once it enters the water, travels forward, in a straight line until the engine gives out. That is, the torpedo

travels ahead if it doesn't hit something. So, in actual war conditions, we would always get nearer to the object than the distance for which the engine is set to run. The speed of a torpedo like this, under water, is a good deal better than thirty miles an hour, but the distance the torpedo can go is naturally short. That is a direct consequence of its speed. Now, Mr. Benson, would you like to know how to fire the torpedo, since it is already in the tube?"

"Certainly, sir," nodded Jack. And then he continued as if reciting a lesson: "Just give that firing lever at the back of the after port a quick shove to the right and downward. That releases the charge of compressed air and forces the torpedo out. At the same instant the forward port opens, so that the torpedo can be shot out into the water. The compressed air also serves to keep the sea water from rushing in through the torpedo tube. When the lever is swung up and back again that closes the forward port, and it is then safe to open this after port."

"You've committed that to memory," laughed the naval lieutenant.

"Oh, we've often talked this over, all three of us," smiled Jack.

"Then, since you understand this part so well, Benson," proposed Mr. Danvers, "per-

haps you'd like to go forward, on deck, and see when this dummy torpedo is fired?"

"I surely would," agreed the submarine boy. "And Eph can just as well come with me."

The two submarine boys, therefore, hastened above, out on the platform deck, and then further forward on the upper hull, until they lay out along the nose of the "Hastings."

Danvers reached Ewald's side in the tower, while Biffens waited below, at the lever, for the firing signal.

The "Hastings" was now drifting, rather aimlessly, something more than four hundred yards away from the scow. As the sea was roughening all the while, the two submarine boys out forward were having a hard time of it. Added to that, icy spray was falling over them.

Lieutenant Danvers quickly rang for speed and then brought the submarine boat within about three hundred yards of the scow, and at a position that pointed the nose of the "Hastings" at the middle of the scow's hull, the line of fire making a right angle with the scow.

"Get ready to watch, out there!" warned the naval officer.

"Now, Eph," glowed Jack, "we're going to see the thing we've so often dreamed about! We'll see that dummy torpedo leap forth, like

a real one. For a little way, at least, we ought to see the track of the torpedo."

"Feel like betting the dummy will hit the scow?" questioned young Somers, half doubtfully.

"Of course it will," retorted Jack Benson, scornfully, "with naval experts on the job!"

Lieutenant Danvers gave the firing signal.

In the silence that followed, the two submarine boys hanging over the nose of the boat heard just a muffled click below. Then——

"There it goes!" shouted Jack Benson, with all the glee in the world.

Down beneath them, under the nose of the "Hastings" an object shot into brief view. First the war-head, then the middle, then the tail and propeller of a fourteen-foot Whitehead torpedo swept away from them, two or three feet below the surface of the waves. A line of bubbles came to the surface, showing that the torpedo was headed, straight and clean, for the stone-laden scow over on the ocean. Then the torpedo, still under water, passed out of their range of view.

"Hurrah!" yelled Jack Benson, leaping to his feet with all the glee and fervor of the enthusiast. "Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!" bellowed Eph Somers, for the glory of the game had gotten into his blood, too.

Both submarine boys capered up and down on the platform deck.

But Lieutenant Danvers sat with left hand on the conning tower steering wheel, his watch in his right hand. He was counting the seconds.

"Look out for the signal," called the naval officer, coolly. "When I tell you, then look out for what happens over at the scow. Er—now!"

They were too far away to hear the impact, but the two submarine boys saw a slight commotion in the waters under the scow's rail. Then the dummy torpedo bounded back, rising and floating on the surface—spent!

Had that torpedo contained the fighting service charge of two hundred pounds of gun-cotton it would have shattered and sunk the biggest, staunchest, proudest battleship afloat.

"It's uncanny—isn't it?" gasped Jack Benson, feeling an odd shudder run over him.

CHAPTER III

STRUCK BY A SUBMERGED FOE

"YEP!" agreed Eph Somers, blaster of day-dreams. "But say?"

"Well?" demanded Captain Jack.

"At the same time," muttered Eph, grimly, "I'm glad that scow isn't a real battleship, with a half a dozen twelve-inch cannon turned on us."

"Humph!" muttered Jack, dryly, "if that scow were an enemy's battleship, twelve-inch barkers and all, we'd be twenty feet under the surface, and we'd be out of sight and out of mind."

"Quite right," nodded Lieutenant Danvers. "In a contest of that sort I'd feel fifty times safer here than on the battleship we were after. Now, Benson, you've seen the first part of it. We have the other dummy to fire. The real gunner, on a submarine, is the fellow at the wheel. Do you want to take the wheel, manœuvre the boat and give the order for the next dummy shot?"

"Do I?" uttered Jack Benson. "Just!"

Orders were then given to place the other dummy torpedo in the tube, and this done, Jack

took his place at the wheel, while Eph Somers and the lieutenant stood outside. At the naval officer's direction Jack Benson came up on the other side of the scow, about three hundred yards away, with the nose of the "Hastings" so pointed that the torpedo dummy could be delivered straight amidships.

At just the right moment Captain Jack passed the order to fire. Then he watched the scow with a strange fascination. Danvers stood, watch in hand.

"Now!" he shouted.

Barely two seconds later the second dummy torpedo rose, a few yards back from the side of the scow.

"That torpedo struck, full and fair," nodded Lieutenant Danvers, turning toward the conning tower. "Mr. Benson, if you always hit as full and well, you'll be an expert torpedoist."

"Why, it's nothing but holding the nose of your own boat full on the other craft, amidships, and the torpedo itself does the rest," uttered the young submarine skipper.

"That's it," nodded Lieutenant Danvers. "But, when you're below the surface, the problem becomes a harder one."

"But then I'd come up enough to use the periscope, and get the bearings of the enemy's vessel," declared Benson. "Then I'd drop be-

low, using the compass for direction, and the number of motor revolutions to give me the knowledge of distance traveled."

"That's just the way it is done," agreed Danvers. "After all, it's just a matter of accurate boat handling, and being able to judge distances by the eye alone. And now, Mr. Benson, if you'll run over yonder, carefully, we'll pick up the dummies. After that, we've got to make as good a shot, with a real torpedo, and sink the scow."

"And, if you don't, sir——?" smiled the young submarine skipper.

"Then we'll be guilty of poor shooting, and have to try the second loaded torpedo," replied the naval officer. "If we miss with the second, then we'll have to contrive either to tow the scow, or to sink her somehow. If either of the loaded torpedoes fails to explode, we'll have to pick it up, at all hazards. If we left a loaded torpedo floating on the surface of the water, here in the paths of coast navigation, it would sink the first ship that struck the war-head of the torpedo."

The sea, by this time, was rough and white-capped, and a brisk wind was blowing down from the north-east. It was no easy task to get a rope around first one dummy torpedo, and then the other. Yet at last this was done, and

the heavy objects were hoisted aboard and stored below.

"Now, we'll get off and sink the scow, before dark," muttered Lieutenant Danvers.

"Are you going to let me fire the torpedo at her, sir?" demanded Skipper Jack Benson, eagerly.

"If you feel sure you can do it," replied the naval officer. "For that matter, if you fail, there'll be one loaded torpedo left, and I can take the second shot."

At a sign from the young skipper Eph hurried below, to relieve Hal Hastings, who wished to see some of the fun. Hal came up into the conning tower to take the wheel while Jack Benson slipped below to direct the loading of the torpedo into the tube. Then Biffens, the sailor, took his post by the firing lever, while Ewald stood back to pass the word from the conning tower.

This loaded torpedo, like the dummies, had been set to run four hundred yards. Captain Jack, therefore, determined to release the torpedo at a range of three hundred yards.

The "Hastings" had drifted somewhat away from the scow, but Jack, one hand on steering wheel and the other at the signals, ran the submarine over so that he could head the craft around to deliver a broadside fire at the scow,

at right angles. When he had the "Hastings" in this position he shouted down:

"Be ready, Ewald!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

A breathless instant followed, during which the young submarine commander took his last sight from the conning tower.

"Fire!"

"Fire it is, sir."

Jack and Hal could just barely see, from the tower, the slight commotion that the torpedo made in the water at the bow when released.

Hal, watch in hand was counting: "One, two, three, four——" and so on.

Suddenly there came a low rumble, followed by——

Boo-oom!

The explosion was a dull and sullen one, but loud enough to make the blood of the submarine boys tingle. A column of spray shot up, followed by detached whiffs of smoke, for the torpedo had exploded beneath the surface.

In the same instant a sound of rending timbers reached their ears. Then the scow—where was it? Only the waters rolled where the scow had been. Captain Jack and Hal rubbed their eyes.

"The same thing would have happened to a battleship," smiled Lieutenant Danvers, who

had come up behind them. "Now, you young men begin to have something like an idea of what an engine of war you are handling, because this craft would be much more deadly, and vastly more nerve-racking to an enemy, because she would approach under water, and those on the battleship would have little or no means of gauging their peril. Incidentally, Mr. Benson, I must congratulate you upon the neatness of the shot."

"To accept congratulations for that would be like robbing a poor-box in a church," laughed Jack. "It called for nothing but aiming the nose of the boat straight."

"And, even under water," replied Danvers, "it calls for but few more calculations. With really trained men all through the crew of a submarine, you can now understand what show the battleship of coming days will have against a single hostile torpedo boat. Why, the captain of a torpedo boat, if he has but one torpedo on board, could sail in under a fleet, pick out his battleship, sink it and then scuttle away, under water, from the rest of the enemy's fleet."

"It seems almost like cowardice, doesn't it?" asked Hal Hastings, soberly.

"Not exactly," replied Lieutenant Danvers, grimly. "In the first place, the game of war is to destroy the enemy with as little loss as pos-

sible to yourself. Moreover, the commander and crew of a submarine torpedo boat, during a naval campaign, would have to take risks enough to make most men's hair turn gray."

"I'm not wishing for war," muttered Jack Benson. "Still, if one has to come, I hope I'll be in command of a torpedo craft that sees service."

"And I think you'd have your wish, my lad," nodded Lieutenant Danvers. "Of course, none but regularly commissioned naval officers may command the craft of the Navy. Still, in our Civil War, and in the War with Spain, we had to commission a good many volunteers. So, in the event of another war coming, I don't believe the Navy Department would feel that it could possibly pass by boys trained as well as you three have been."

"Are you going to use the other loaded torpedo to-day, sir?" asked Jack.

"Against *what?*" demanded Danvers. "You've sunk the scow as deep as the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean."

"Then I suppose we may as well put back to Dunhaven, sir?"

"Yes, Benson."

Jack accordingly signaled for slow speed ahead, turning the nose of the "Hastings" toward the west. Hal and Eph, as the submarine

started back, took a drill in loading and unloading torpèdoes into the tube, performing this work with one of the dummies, Ewald and Biffens assisting.

Knowing that Hal was not in the engine room, Captain Jack was content to run along at slow speed. Nor had the boat gone more than two miles when something struck the bow.

At the first impact alert Jack Benson felt his heart leap into his mouth. It was as though the "Hastings" had struck, lightly, on a reef.

Almost by instinct Jack threw the wheel over to port. Something was rasping, forcefully, under the hull of the submarine. As the helm went to port that something underneath, whatever it was, sheered off.

"What was that, Benson?" called up Lieutenant Danvers, sharply.

"Struck something, sir, I'm sure," Jack called back.

At the first sound of trouble Hal Hastings leaped into the engine room. Lieutenant Danvers sprang up the stairs into the conning tower. He was in time to find Captain Jack swinging the nose of the "Hastings" around. Then the youthful commander signaled for the stop and the reverse.

"Mr. Somers!" shouted Jack, coolly but promptly.

"Aye, sir," called up Eph.

"Take a lantern and get down into the compartments along the keel forward. See whether we're taking in any water."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"We struck part of a derelict, or something else submerged," guessed Lieutenant Danvers. "We're lucky, indeed, if our plates are not sprung."

Then he called down to Biffens to follow and aid Eph Somers.

It was almost dark now. Jack, reaching over, switched on the electric sidelights outside, and also the white light at the signal masthead. Then he turned on the searchlight, sending its bright ray through the gathering darkness.

"Look over there, sir," muttered Jack, holding the searchlight ray steadily on an object he believed he saw. "Don't you make out, sir, bobbing up and down when the waves part, what looks like the stump of the broken-off mast of a vessel submerged? Is it a death-dealing derelict in the very path of coastwise navigation?"

"By Jove, yes!" gasped Lieutenant Danvers, hoarsely. "Your eyes are sharp, Benson, and your judgment sound. That, then, was what we struck on—the mast-stump of a water-logged, sunken derelict! If our underhull plates are sprung, down we go to the bottom!"

They waited, in dreadful anxiety, for the report of Eph from the region of the keel plates.

They were far out to sea, and a submarine cannot carry a lifeboat!

CHAPTER IV

A SUBMARINE'S REVENGE

ALL now waited on Eph's word during the next few moments.

If the "Hastings," striking on that stub of a submerged mast, had had her plates so badly sprung that pumping would not drive out the water as fast as it came in, then this newest of the submarines was doomed to go to the bottom.

All that would then remain to those aboard would be to take to the ocean.

True, they had life-preservers aboard, and with these, officers and men could keep afloat.

In the icy waters of a February night, however, with something like fifteen miles to swim to mainland through an ever-roughening sea, it was almost impossible that the strongest among them could hope to reach shore alive.

Yet, desperately anxious as he was to know the news, Jack Benson did not desert his post by the steering wheel. Some one must be there.

Nor had Hal thought of leaving the engine room.

So the naval lieutenant remained with Benson, duplicating, in those awful moments, the boy's cool courage.

It was Ewald who presently came running up the stairs to report.

"Mr. Somers orders me to report that there's a little trickle of water coming in between two plates about twelve feet abaft of the bow, sir. But Mr. Somers believes that, even without pumping, we could run forty miles without serious danger, sir."

Knowing his friend's ability and good judgment as he did, Jack Benson stood ready to accept that report, without question. But Lieutenant Danvers inquired:

"Did you see the leak, Ewald?"

"Yes, sir."

"What do you think about it?"

"Why, sir, I agree with Mr. Somers."

"I believe I'll go down and take a look at the leak," announced Danvers, slowly.

"Then, while you're gone," said Benson, "I'll keep the searchlight steadily on what I can see of the top of that mast-stump."

"Why not keep on in toward the shore?"

"Because, sir," and Jack's jaws snapped, "if we've been insulted in this fashion by an old

derelict, I don't believe in letting the old derelict get off so easily, sir."

Lieutenant Danvers knitted his brow, thoughtfully, as he hurried down the stairs, then followed Ewald through a steel trapway into the cramped compartments under the cabin flooring.

In three or four minutes Mr. Danvers came up again.

"It's all right," he said. "I can't see that the leak threatens to become serious, unless we should happen to hit that mast-stump again."

"I believed it was all right," the young captain replied, quietly, "after having heard Mr. Somers's report."

"You three boys certainly stick together and admire each other, don't you?" laughed Danvers.

"We've every reason to, sir. We three have been trained together in this work. No one of the three knows anything that the others don't," came Benson's matter-of-fact reply.

"When I went below you made some remark about not letting the derelict off too easily, Benson. What did you mean?"

"Why, I believe we ought to get square with that old sunken hulk," retorted Captain Jack, wheeling around and eyeing the naval officer.

"Great Scott! You mean that we ought to blow up the derelict?"

"Isn't it usually the Navy, sir, that gets such jobs to do?"

"Yes, yes, Benson. But the Navy Department always sends out a vessel fitted for such work."

"This is a submarine boat. We have one loaded torpedo left on board. Don't you think we answer the description of a vessel fitted for destroying a derelict?" smiled Captain Jack, coolly. "To say nothing of the itch for revenge that we feel."

"It'll be a ticklish business," muttered Danvers, thoughtfully.

"So is a lot of the Navy's work, isn't it?" persisted Captain Jack.

"See here, lad, do you really mean that you want to make a sure-enough job of blowing up the derelict?"

"That's what I'm staying here for, sir," rejoined Jack, again swinging the searchlight. "And over there, three hundred yards yonder, I can still make out, once in a while, that bit of mast. What do you say, Lieutenant?"

"Why, if you boys have the grit to go ahead and tackle a job like that in the night, the Navy isn't going to feel chilled and run away," laughed Danvers, shortly. "Yet, my boy, do you think you fully understand the dangers of the undertaking?"

"I think I do," nodded Captain Jack.

"It's to be a duel between this submarine and the old derelict. You can't just hang off like this, over here, and shoot at that mast. That wouldn't do any good."

"Yes, I know all that," said Jack, eagerly.

"Then what's your plan, Benson?"

"Why, sir, we've got, first of all, to sail as close as we dare to that mast-stump. Then we've got to use a sounding line to find out in which direction the hull of the sunken derelict lies. We must also get an idea of the length of the hull. Then, having gotten our figures, we'll have to glide back a little way, so as to give a right-angle broadside on at the hull of the derelict. Before firing the torpedo we'll first have to go far enough below water so that we'll know we're in fair line with that sunken hull yonder, for we've got to make our one loaded torpedo do the trick."

"You've got the figures down all right," nodded Lieutenant Danvers, thoughtfully. "The risky part is in trying to run over that derelict's sunken hull in order to locate it and make your soundings. Now, you run a big chance of running plumb on to some other stump of a mast. The 'Hastings' may easily get an injury, from the stump of another mast,

that may tear a real hole in our plates and send us all to the bottom."

"There's danger to be considered in any submarine game really worth the while," assented Captain Jack Benson, coolly. "Do you feel, then, Mr. Danvers, that we should be satisfied to drive back to Dunhaven and content ourselves with wiring the Navy Department news of the derelict and of her present position?"

Lieutenant Danvers thoughtfully gazed at the young submarine commander's face.

"No," he muttered, at last. "I think the best thing for a fellow like you, Jack Benson, will be to wade in and get your revenge! And make it as complete as you can!"

"All right, sir," nodded Jack. "Thank you. And now, we'll see how complete a job we can make of it. Mr. Somers!"

"Aye, aye, sir," answered Eph, from below.

"Are you going to consult with your crew?" whispered Danvers.

"They're not the kind of fellows who need consulting," muttered Captain Jack. "All they want is their orders. Mr. Somers, bring up the sounding line.

"Aye, aye, sir."

In a moment more young Somers was in the conning tower, and Jack, sounding line in hand,

was out on the platform deck, where Lieutenant Danvers followed him.

Eph knew, by this time, what was wanted of him. Hal, in the engine room, was, as yet, ignorant of the game, but all Hal had to do was to obey engine room signals promptly.

Sending the submarine craft ahead at very slow speed, Eph steered as close to the bobbing masthead as the young captain deemed safe. Jack shouted his orders back as he and Lieutenant Danvers crouched over the nose of the boat.

In the rough sea that was running their work was doubly hard. But Eph kept the searchlight all the time turned in the direction of the top of the bobbing mast stump. In a circle they went around it, barely thirty feet from the broken mast, Jack heaving the sounding lead.

At last he felt it rest on the deck of the sunken derelict. The distance below was six fathoms—thirty-six feet.

"Now, we've got the line of the hull," called Benson to the lieutenant. "Our next job is to find how far back this hull runs under the water."

This knowledge, also, was gained, at last. Then Jack Benson, rising, hastened back to the conning tower, followed by Danvers. Jack himself closed the manhole, while Eph still trained

the searchlight through the darkness of the night. Stormy weather was threatening.

"Now, hustle below, Eph, and get that loaded torepdo into the tube," commanded Skipper Jack Benson.

"My men will help you," added Lieutenant Danvers.

Jack quickly had his figures made. He knew where the hull lay, in what direction, and how far below the surface the deck of the sunken derelict lay. He planned to land the torpedo twelve feet below the derelict's deck, which, he believed, would strike a full and fair blow.

"Torpedo's loaded, sir," called Eph, while the "Hastings," under slow speed astern, was gliding back to get into position for the attack.

"Station Biffens by the firing lever, then," called down Captain Benson. "Tell him to fire on the instant that he gets the order. Now, Mr. Somers, stand by the submerging apparatus. Drop just forty-two feet below the surface, then report instantly to me."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Lieutenant Danvers stood by the submarine boy, intently watching, listening, and digesting Benson's plan. Yet the naval officer ventured no interference.

In another moment the hull of the "Hastings" began to disappear under the waves.

"Forty-two feet —sir — and — s t o p p e d!" shouted up Eph Somers.

"Ready to fire!" Jack hailed.

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Fire!"

"Fire it is, sir."

"Have you fired, Mr. Somers?" rolled down Jack's next question.

"Yes, sir."

"Then turn on the compressed air, and bring us to the surface."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

The instant that the conning tower stood up, dripping, through the waves, Jack turned on the searchlight again. Slow speed ahead he next signaled.

As the piercing rays of light gleamed out over the waters before them the surface of the sea ahead was seen to be covered with floating litter.

"Jove, look at the wreckage!" uttered Lieutenant Danvers, jubilantly. "Everything about that old derelict that could float has come up to the surface."

"Do you think the derelict is utterly smashed, sir?" inquired Jack Benson, respectfully, for this trained naval officer knew more about such things than he did.

"That derelict is blown to kindling wood," exclaimed Danvers, himself manipulating the

searchlight as they sailed through a sea littered with small wreckage. "That derelict will never menace any skipper afloat, from now on. Benson, lad, you did a wonderfully keen job."

"You don't think there'd be any risk, then, in sailing back and forth amid this wreckage?" asked Jack.

"Risk? Not a bit," retorted Danvers. "Why, look over there!" as he swung the searchlight in a new direction. "There's that submerged mast-stump, free of the wreck and floating horizontally, now."

Nor was it long before it was clear to trained eyes that the sunken derelict had been efficiently blown up. That water-logged ghost of a ship would never again be a source of peril to navigators.

"Now, you can turn your nose for Dunhaven, and with a clear conscience," chuckled Lieutenant Danvers. "And, while you're doing that, I'm going below for another look at the little leak."

Jack ran the "Hastings" the first few miles of her homeward course. Then he called Eph Somers to the wheel and went below to relax.

It was well on toward eight o'clock when the "Hastings" ran into the little harbor at Dunhaven and made moorings. The night watchman of the yard rowed out to meet them,

bringing the news that Mr. Farnum, in the "Benson," had picked up the crew of the "Mary Bond" from two small boats at sea.

There was a light in the office, so Jack's party went inside. There they found Jacob Farnum at his desk, putting the finishing touches to a telegram.

"By Jove, I'm glad we went out after the poor fellows of the 'Mary Bond,'" cried Mr. Farnum, wheeling around. "We found them in sore straits, in two small boats, with only a pair of oars to each boat, and the sea roughening up every minute. They lost their fishing smack. Their boat struck on the stump of a mast of a sunken derelict. The smack sprung a big leak, this morning, and went down. I've just written a telegram to the Navy Department, Mr. Danvers, advising them of the location of the derelict as well as I could gather it from the captain of the late 'Mary Bond.'" With this, he handed Danvers the telegram he had written.

Lieutenant Danvers glanced at the telegram, and then handed it back with a smile.

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded Jacob Farnum, wonderingly.

"The telegram isn't necessary—that's all," replied the naval officer, with a smile. "We encountered that same sunken derelict—and Jack Benson blew her to smithereens!"

CHAPTER V

THE MYSTERIOUS ORDER COMES

THAT night a machinist was stationed aboard the "Hastings" to watch the incoming of water through the slight leak, and to apply the pump occasionally.

In the morning the submarine was hauled up into an improvised drydock and her hull plates examined. It was Lieutenant Danvers's first chance to realize how superbly these Pollard boats were built and put together. He examined the hull with unbounded enthusiasm. Then a gang of workmen started in to replace the two injured plates.

For the next three days the "Benson" was used in target practice. Jacob Farnum scurried up and down the coast, finding and buying suitable old craft for targets.

All three of the submarine boys had ample practice in the firing of torpedoes. After it was all over there were but four of the loaded torpedoes left in the shed labeled "Danger."

"If you could only have a little more practice," grumbled Williamson, good-humoredly, "this would soon be a safe town for a fellow to take a quiet smoke in."

The "Hastings" was now in the water once more, as sound and staunch as on the first day she was launched.

Then came a few days of idleness. Lieutenant Danvers left Dunhaven, intending apparently to return soon. Ewald and Biffens, the two sailors, were quartered at the hotel at government expense, and were likely to enjoy themselves until orders came.

Eph went home for two or three days. Jack and Hal slept on board the "Benson," while Williamson quartered himself aboard the "Hastings," which craft no longer carried any torpedoes.

One afternoon, as Jack Benson was strolling through the shipyard, Jacob Farnum, in the doorway of the office building, called to the young skipper.

"I suppose both boats are ready, Jack?" asked the shipbuilder.

"Quite, sir," nodded Benson.

He did not inquire for what they were expected to be ready. Jacob Farnum was one who liked to plan by himself, and to announce a new move only when he was ready for it.

"All right, lad," nodded Farnum. "Keep both boats ready for any instant move that may be required of them. That's all."

Again young Benson nodded, then strolled on

out of the yard. Up on the Main street of the village he encountered his chum.

"There's something in the wind, Hal, for the boats," Jack announced.

"All right," nodded Hal. "We're ready when needed."

Nor did either one of them waste any time in wondering what the new move was to be. When Jacob Farnum wanted them to know he would tell them and not before.

The chums visited a moving picture show for an hour. Then, tiring of that, they came out into the street. The first man they encountered, almost, was Lieutenant Danvers, in citizen dress.

"Back from your trip, sir?" Jack asked.

"Yes. Has Farnum told you what's in the wind?"

"He has only given us a hint, sir, that something may happen."

"Oh!" replied the naval officer, next adding: "That's rather queer on the whole."

"Not at all, sir," replied young Benson. "Mr. Farnum has a habit of telling us things only when he's ready."

"Yet when——" began Danvers, but checked himself.

"No matter what is in the wind, Mr. Danvers, there's no real need of posting us about anything until the time comes. Suppose Mr.

Farnum wants us to start for China within an hour? The galley cupboard is already as full of provisions as it will hold. Both boats are in the best possible trim. We need only time, perhaps, to fill the gasoline tanks as full as they'll hold. Then we're ready to cast off and sail for the first stopping place on the route."

"You're great fellows for system, then. So I understand why Mr. Farnum doesn't have to post you far in advance."

"He certainly doesn't have to," Jack replied.

"Where are you going? Down to the yard?"

"Not yet. Mr. Farnum hasn't given us any instructions about hanging around."

"Oh!" responded Lieutenant Danvers, with a quizzical smile. "Well, I must be leaving you, now."

Hal gazed after the shore-bound naval officer for a few moments, then observed, dryly:

"I'm not a bit curious. Are you, Jack?"

"Of course not," smiled the young skipper. "All I want to know is what's in the air so suddenly."

"Going back to the yard earlier?"

"No; later," retorted Benson. "What is the use of letting folks suppose they have our curiosity aroused?"

In fact, when evening came on, instead of go-

ing to the "Benson" for supper, Jack and Hal stopped at the hotel.

Ewald and Biffens were there, at one of the tables, but the sailors seemed to be eating in more haste than usual. Then, as they left the dining room, they saluted the young captain and engineer.

"Hurrying back to the yard, sir?" asked Ewald.

"No," said Jack, quietly.

"That's queer. Them's our orders. We're going now, sir," replied Ewald.

"You and I appear to be the only two in Dunhaven who don't know what is up," observed Hal Hastings, dryly.

"I don't believe Ewald or Biffens know what is on hand," Jack answered. "They've orders to report back in haste. That's all."

"Then hadn't we better hurry back to the yard, too?" inquired Hastings.

"No; we haven't any orders."

"But Mr. Farnum may be wondering where we are."

"Then the sailors can tell him; they know."

Jack dawdled over his supper.

"Going back to the yard now?" asked Hal.

"No; to the bookstore."

"Hm!" muttered Hal. "I begin to think

you're going to keep Mr. Farnum guessing, to pay him back in his own coin."

"No; I'm going up to the store to pick out a small stack of books. Hal, I believe we're going on a cruise, and I mean to have something to read."

"I wonder if you know more than you've told me?" mused Hal, aloud.

"Not a blessed thing. I'm on the guessing-list, and I'm doing the best I know how at guessing."

Hal didn't say any more, but accompanied his chum to the book-store. There was a package for each of them to carry when they came out. Then they headed down toward the shipyard.

It was well on toward nine o'clock by the time that the chums stepped through the gate into the yard.

"Mr. Farnum is still at his office. That's late for him," remarked Hal.

"Maybe some one has him on the guessing-list, too," laughed Benson.

The night watchman came forward out of a shadow.

"Boss wants to see you young gentlemen," announced the watchman.

So Jack and Hal turned in there. As they entered the office a scene of "solid comfort" met their eyes. Shipbuilder and naval officer

were lounging in easy chairs, smoking Havanas until the air was thick and white with the smoke.

"Sailing orders, Jack," announced Farnum.

"All right, sir," nodded the young skipper, looking at his watch. "I can pull out inside of twelve minutes."

"But you don't have to," laughed Farnum. "You have until morning. Where do you suppose you're going?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Curious, Jack?"

"I don't care where we're going," Benson smiled back. "When it's a matter of business all parts of the earth look alike to me."

Lieutenant Danvers laughed heartily.

"Benson, lad," exclaimed the naval officer, "you've got the real make-up to serve in the Navy. It's a pity we had to lose you."

"Don't be too sure yet, sir, that the Navy has escaped having me," smiled back Skipper Jack.

"You don't start until eight in the morning," went on the shipbuilder. "Pollard got back this evening, and he goes with us. We take both the 'Benson' and the 'Hastings.' Eph will have to command one of the boats, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir; and he'll have to be notified at once, too," replied the young submarine commander.

"He's on one of the craft now," replied Mr. Farnum. "Lieutenant Danvers goes with us,

but he's a guest, only, and will not have to help in handling the boats. His two men, Ewald and Biffens, will take steering turns. We've a four hundred and eighty mile sail before us, down to Groton Bay."

"I know of the place, sir," nodded Jack, without emotion or enthusiasm. But Jacob Farnum's next words all but lifted the submarine boys from their feet.

"Jack, my boy, and you, too, Hal, at Groton Bay you will have to make the very efforts of your lives. We're to go through an official test for the United States Government. We shall be in competition with five other types of submarine boats—the Rhinds, the Seawold, the Griffith, and the Blackson and Day. We shall have to meet—and I hope, vanquish—all the recognized types of submarine boats made in the United States."

"And we will beat them, too!" glowed Jack Benson, his eyes flashing and his fists clenching.

"By the way, Jack," continued Mr. Farnum, "I had two applications for work this afternoon, from men who appear to know all about gasoline marine engines. As we'll be shorthanded for such a long cruise, do you suppose it would be worth while to look these fellows over and make up our minds about them?"

"Great Dewey—no!" burst, vehemently, from

the young submarine captain. "If we're going into the test of our lives—for our very lives, I might say—then we don't want aboard any strangers who show up looking for jobs at the last moment. No, sir; I won't have them aboard—that is, not if I go, too!"

"I guess that's sensible enough," nodded Mr. Farnum. "Well, get aboard, boys. Lieutenant Danvers will be out by ten o'clock. Don't lie awake to-night, thinking too hard of what's before you."

"Don't you expect us to, sir," smiled Captain Jack. "We need our sleep to-night, if we've got such work ahead of us. It's big work, sir."

"Big enough," nodded Jacob Farnum. "If we come out of this big official test with all the points of the game, then Uncle Sam is likely to buy all the submarine boats we can make for a couple of years to come—and our fortunes will be made—yours, too, boys!"

This talk of the boys' fortunes being at stake was not a matter of idle words. Jack, Hal and Eph well understood that, if they came out successful, they would also be at least moderately well off. Messrs. Farnum and Pollard were not of the kind to be niggardly in giving rewards fairly won.

CHAPTER VI

JUDAS & CO. INTRODUCE THEMSELVES

GROTON BAY, as every student of geography knows, is a nearly landlocked, well sheltered body of water, some seven miles long and three wide. At the mouth of the Groton River stands Colfax, a city of more than thirty thousand inhabitants.

This was about all that the submarine boys knew of their destination, until they arrived in the bay on the afternoon of the day after they left Dunhaven.

Their run down had been a continuous one. Jack had had Biffens to relieve him at the wheel, while Mr. Farnum had helped Hal in the engine room. Besides, Lieutenant Danvers had kindly stood a few tricks at the wheel.

While Jack came in the "Benson," which carried the two remaining loaded torpedoes, Eph had handled the "Hastings," with Ewald as relief. Williamson had handled the engines of the latter boat, David Pollard standing relief engine room watch.

The work had been hard and confining. It was a relief to all hands when they found themselves heading into Groton Bay.

Not far from the city water front lay two United States gunboats, the "Chelsea" and the "Oakland." Near the gunboats a fleet of seven other submarine craft lay at moorings.

"We're not the only crowd, then," mused Jacob Farnum, "that has seen fit to enter more than one boat. I shall have to get busy in the hunt for information."

"I'm not much worried about the triumph of the Pollard boats over competitors," declared Danvers, generously. "And, if anything can win for you, Mr. Farnum, it's the having of such enthusiasts as your submarine boys to handle your boats in the official tests."

"Oh, I can depend upon my boys," replied Jacob Farnum, quickly. "I know all about them."

Yet, as the shipbuilder gazed from the conning tower at the rival submarines actual drops of cold sweat oozed out on his forehead. Success meant so much to this shipbuilder, who had all his capital, to the last penny, invested in this submarine game.

"The worst of it is, we've got to keep on the lookout for dirty tricks!" groaned the shipbuilder, to himself. "We are willing to play fair to the last gasp. No doubt some of the other competing submarine builders feel the same way about it. Yet, with so many rivals in

the field, there are sure to be one or two rascally fellows who won't consider any trick too low to give them an advantage."

Though Mr. Farnum had no particular rival, or rivals, in mind, his fears, as was afterwards proven, were only too well founded.

"Take the wheel, please, Mr. Farnum," Jack begged. He ran down the steps to call:

"On deck, Biffens!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" replied the sailor, scrambling to obey.

Jack was out on the platform deck, megaphone in hand, by the time that his employer ran up rather close to the "Chelsea."

"Will you direct us to our moorings, sir?" Jack shouted to the watch officer aboard the gunboat.

"Proceed slowly east. Our launch will follow and show you your moorings," came the reply. Then the launch glided around the stern of the gunboat, leading the way.

Ten minutes later the "Benson" and the "Hastings" were moored, at the extreme eastern end of the line of submarine craft.

Then Hal, mopping his face from the engine room heat, came up on deck for a breath of air.

"I don't suppose we can get ashore," murmured young Hastings, gazing wistfully at the city beyond.

"No," muttered Jack, shaking his head. "We're short-handed as it is, and we've got to be on hand to watch these boats. There are too many of the enemy about, in the shape of rival builders and their employees, and among them there may be some mean tricksters who'd do anything in their power to put the Pollard boats out of the running in the tests to come. No; I reckon we won't see much of the shore, except from our decks, though it is mighty cramped and confining on one of these small craft."

Hal took a couple of turns up and down the deck. No one, until he has tried it, can realize how cramped such small craft are when one has to remain any length of time aboard.

Suddenly Hal paused, pointing landward.

"Great Scott!" he gasped. "Look who's here!"

A roomy whaleboat was approaching them. In it, as passengers, sat Grant Andrews, foreman, and five workmen from the home yard.

"What can have happened?" wondered Captain Jack, as he and his chum waved their hands in greeting; then stood staring.

"Surprised, eh, lads?" laughingly demanded Jacob Farnum, who had stolen up behind them.

"Yes; what's wrong?" asked Jack.

"Nothing," replied the shipbuilder.

"Then what are Andrews and the other men doing here?"

"Do you notice," hinted Mr. Farnum, "that the men with Andrews are all picked from among our older, trusted shipyard men?"

"Yes, sir. That's true."

"Well, in the first place," pursued Farnum, "if any sudden repairs, fixings or other work are required in a hurry, while we're here, we have a fine lot of our own men to attend to it. Before leaving I told Grant to bring these men with him. Then they'll serve another purpose. I want you youngsters to be keyed up to your best performances all the time we're here. That you can't do if you're kept confined closely aboard until your very souls ache. So, as much of the time as is wise, you young fellows will be ashore, stretching your legs, and Grant Andrews and his men will be on board as guards."

"That's great!" glowed Jack. "And mighty considerate of you, too, sir."

"Considerate? Not a bit of it!" retorted Jacob Farnum, half indignantly. "Jack Benson, I want to drain the last bit of performance out of you youngsters that I possibly can while we're here. That's why I am going to take some good care of you, also. Right this way, Grant!"

The hail was directed at the foreman. The whaleboat put in alongside of the "Benson," and the foreman with two of his men came aboard.

"And now, everyone else over the side to go ashore!" called the shipbuilder.

This order was quickly obeyed. Then the whaleboat continued on over to the "Hastings," where Eph and his companions were taken off and the remaining three workmen from the home yard left aboard as guards.

Mr. Farnum had already ascertained that the naval board which was to be in charge of the tests was quartered at the leading hotel on shore. Hence, in landing, the shipbuilder was really killing two birds with a single stone, as he intended to report at once to the head of the board for whatever instructions the latter had to give.

"We may as well go up to the hotel in style," announced Mr. Farnum, when the entire party, the naval lieutenant included, had landed at the wharf. The two sailors, Ewald and Biffens, had already gone away to places of their own choosing.

There were three or four automobiles for hire near the wharf. Two of these Mr. Farnum engaged for his own party. In five minutes more they stood about in the handsome lobby of the

Somerset House while their host registered for the party.

Jack, Hal and Eph stood at ease, some distance from the men of the party. Despite their easy attitudes there was yet a certain military erectness about them which was heightened by the handsome, natty uniforms that they wore.

At the further end of the hotel lobby was a doorway before which stood a folding screen. Past that was a clump of potted palms.

Behind the palms stood a man who, once seen, was not likely to be forgotten. He was not a handsome man. About fifty years of age, he was unusually stout; and, though his clothing was of expensive texture, it fitted him badly. On his upper lip was a heavy moustache, now iron-gray. His face was red, almost bloated. There were heavy pouches under his eyes that told of many hours of senseless, vicious dissipation. A small wart on the left side of the man's nose emphasized his lack of good looks. Though the face was large, the eyes were small, beady, and often full of cunning. There was some iron-gray hair at each side of the head; the top was bald.

This man was John C. Rhinds, head of the Rhinds Submarine Company. Three of the boats now at anchor in Groton Bay were his—

or, rather, his company's, though John Rhinds owned nearly all of the stock in the company.

So far, Rhinds had not succeeded in selling a submarine craft to the Navy Department. Twice he had been on the point of a sale, but each time the government had decided upon a Pollard boat, instead.

John C. Rhinds loved money. He was resolved, at any cost, to make the government buy several of his boats. And he was utterly unscrupulous.

As he stood behind the palms, looking toward the group of new arrivals, Rhinds's little eyes seemed to grow smaller. He knew the members of this party, though none of them as yet knew Rhinds. But the cunning man had made it his business to find out all about the people whom he hoped to beat in the coming game.

"Here you are, Radwin!"

Mr. Rhinds almost hissed the summons, calling to his side a man of some thirty years of age, tall, dark, handsome, slender and wearing his fine clothes with an air of distinction.

At first glance one would be inclined to like the appearance of Fred Radwin. A closer study of the somewhat shifty eyes and general reckless expression might have turned one skilled in human nature against Mr. Fred Radwin, who was secretary to the Rhinds Company.

"That's the crowd, right over there, that have sold two boats under our noses to the Navy Department," continued Rhinds, a snarl framing about his thick, ugly lips. "That's the crowd we've got to beat."

"Then those young chaps must be the three young submarine officers with such fine records," remarked Fred Radwin, in an undertone.

"They are," nodded Rhinds, slowly. "They're bright youngsters, too. I wish we had them on our side."

"Couldn't they be lured over into our employ, then?" asked Radwin.

"You don't know the youngsters. They're full of fool notions about loyalty to the Farnum-Pollard crowd. And, besides, the boys have an interest in the rival company."

"Couldn't we offer the boys a bigger interest with us?" suggested Radwin, as he peered through the palms at the other submarine group.

"No!" retorted Rhinds, sharply. "I know about that crowd. You don't. Listen to me."

"I'm listening," said Fred Radwin.

"We've got to make the acquaintance of that whole crowd, Fred. We've got to get personally acquainted with them all. That will be easy enough, I think. Then we've got to lay our plans. The Pollard boats must have no show whatever in the coming tests, do you under-

stand? Their craft must balk, or behave badly. We must destroy all naval confidence in Pollard boats. Then we must engineer matters so that none of that crowd will be fit to find out what ails their boats—in time, anyway. The easiest point of attack will be the boys themselves. It is absolutely necessary to get them out of the game some way or other—I don't care what! Radwin, you're fertile enough in ideas, and reckless enough in deeds. This is to be your task—put the Pollard boats and those submarine boys wholly out of the running! First of all, we'll get acquainted with them. Come along!"

The Farnum party were just turning away, to follow a bell-boy to the rooms assigned to them upstairs, when John C. Rhinds, his face beaming craftily, approached them, followed by Radwin. Rhinds introduced himself to Farnum, then presented Radwin as secretary to the Rhinds Company.

"We're rivals in a way, of course," declared Mr. Rhinds. "But we want to be good-natured, friendly rivals, my dear Farnum. We hope to see a good deal of you all while here."

Jacob Farnum replied with equal cordiality. When it came Jack Benson's turn to be introduced, Rhinds seized him by the hand, patting his shoulder.

"Captain Benson?" he repeated. "The

brainiest young man in America—with two chums who run him a close race. We must all dine together to-night," purred this Judas of the submarine boat world.

CHAPTER VII

EPH SOMERS PLAYS GALLANT

"I DON'T know when I've enjoyed myself as much," exclaimed Rhinds, looking round beamingly over the dinner party in one corner of the dining room.

Lieutenant Danvers was not there, having pleaded another engagement. But Rhinds and his lieutenant, Radwin, Messrs. Farnum and Pollard and all three of the submarine boys were around the big table. Radwin had succeeded in seating himself between Jack and Hal.

The dinner had been a fine one. Only one hitch had occurred; that was when Mr. Rhinds, at the beginning of the meal, had tried to order several bottles of wine.

"Just a moment, Mr. Rhinds," Farnum broke in. "None of the wine for us, thank you."

"Oh, then, some lighter kind of wine," proposed Mr. Rhinds, anxiously. "Something good, in which we can all pledge one another."

"None of that stuff, according to our way of

thinking, is any good," replied Farnum, with a good-natured smile.

"Well, perhaps not for the boys," conceded the host of this dinner. "But for the rest of us, as business men ready to cement a friendship."

"Alcohol isn't cement," replied Mr. Farnum, mildly. "At least, not with our party. The time was, I admit, Mr. Rhinds, when business men often tried to cement a business friendship with wine or liquor. But those times have gone by. Drinking is out of date, nowadays. The keenest and most dependable business men are those who do not drink. In fact, I may go a little further, and say that, in our business at Dunhaven, we have come to the point where we no longer have any dealings with business men whom we know to drink. You will understand, of course, that this is said without criticism of whatever views you yourself may entertain."

"Oh, well, then," grunted Rhinds, much taken back by the fairly spoken words of his rival. "I dare say there was too much drinking in the old days. Yes, Farnum, I am much inclined to agree with you, and we will do without the wine."

None the less, it was plain that their host was much annoyed.

"I want to get at the members of the naval

board," declared Mr. Farnum, toward the end of the meal. "I want to find out what is planned in the tests that are to take place here."

"The members of the board," replied Mr. Rhinds, "are the three men, in citizen dress, who are at the sixth table down from here. They came into their dinner about ten minutes ago. As to to-morrow, I can tell you that, beginning at eleven o'clock, all the submarine boats entered are to take a straight, out-to-sea speed sail for six hours. The gunboat, 'Chelsea' will start the fleet, and the 'Oakland' will go along with the racers."

"That's short time for us," muttered Mr. Farnum, uneasily.

"Luckily, sir, we're ready, at a single moment's notice," interposed Captain Jack Benson.

"As soon as we get through," proposed Mr. Rhinds, easily, "I'll take you over and present you to Captain Magowan and his associates on the board."

"That is kind of you," nodded Mr. Farnum, gratefully.

Accordingly, a few minutes later, Mr. Rhinds arose, sauntering, cigar in mouth, over to the table of the officers of the naval board. He spoke with them a few moments, then returned.

"Mr. Farnum, and Mr Pollard," announced

Rhinds, "Captain Magowan and his associates invite you to come over and sit at their table. Radwin, will you look after our young friends? See whether you can show them any courtesies."

A highly significant look passed between the portly rascal and his secretary. None of the Farnum party, however, noted it.

"Well, what shall we do, boys?" inquired Radwin, genially, as the four sauntered down the lobby toward the hotel entrance.

"I reckon taking things easily and restfully will suit us as well as anything," smiled Jack. "That is, unless you have some plan you particularly wish to suggest."

"Well," continued Radwin, thoughtfully, "the town is rather full of sailors, just at present, and they're making the nights lively in some sections. Do you care to go around with me, and see what the sailors are doing to drive dull care away?"

"Well, that is a question," said Jack Benson quickly. "We're boys, you know!"

"Sensible young fellows," cried Fred Radwin, in a tone so full of approval as to disarm all suspicion. "Then, for a while, what do you say if we take window seats here near the entrance, and note whatever may be passing on the street? By that time your employers may be through with the board members and come out."

"Why not go outside in the air, and walk up and down the block?" suggested Jack.

"Excellent!" agreed Radwin, readily. He accompanied them outside, though, a few moments later, he excused himself, saying that he had to go to the nearest drugstore to write a short letter and post it.

"What do you think of Radwin?" Hal asked.

"Why, I guess he's a good deal the sort of fellow that Rhinds wants," Captain Jack answered, slowly.

"Don't you like Rhinds?" demanded Eph.

"Now, would it be just right to say that?" asked Jack, slowly. "Mr. Rhinds has tried to be very pleasant to us to-night. So has Mr. Radwin. Probably they're both good fellows, in their own way. Only——"

"Well?" insisted Hal.

"Why, to tell the truth," confessed Captain Benson, "Rhinds impresses me as being just a bit coarse, and Radwin a little too smooth and slick. To put it another way, they're not just our kind of people. That is, they're not at all in the same class with gentlemen like Jake Farnum and Dave Pollard. Now, that's every word I'm going to say against Rhinds or Radwin, for they've certainly been agreeable to us to-night."

Chatting thus, as they strolled slowly back

and forth, none of the submarine boys noted how long Radwin was gone. As a matter of fact, that enterprising, rapidly-moving young man was away for nearly half an hour—and he was tremendously busy on their account.

The Somerset stood on one of the older, quieter streets of Colfax. At this time of the night there were not many passers.

"Here comes Radwin," discovered Hal, at last. "I had almost forgotten that he was coming back to us."

"I thought he had forgotten," laughed Jack.

Then all three turned to greet Mr. Radwin.

"How's this?" he asked. "Haven't Mr. Rhinds and your friends come out yet?"

"They must be talking, yet, with the officers of the naval board," suggested Eph Somers.

"They're sure to be out presently," nodded Radwin, after he had walked the submarine boys to the next corner. "At least, Mr. Rhinds is, for he always takes a walk in the evening, after dinner. Now, I've discovered the place where they serve the finest hot soda—chocolate, at that. I wanted to invite all hands there. But I'm afraid Rhinds and your employers may come out and be looking for us. Benson, do you feel like remaining here, to guide them along, while I take your comrades up to the place? You can tell the older men where we are, and

then Mr. Rhinds will bring you all around. He knows the place. Come along, Somers and Hastings. Benson, bring the older ones as soon as you see them come out of the hotel."

"Why, say, Jack, you go along now," urged Eph. "You know I don't care much about chocolate, and you do. So run along. I'll stay right here until I see our people."

"Good boy, Eph!" murmured Jack, gratefully. "You know my weakness for hot chocolate. I feel as if I could punish four of five of 'em right now."

As he turned away with Jack and Hal, Mr. Radwin looked rather disappointed. In fact, he was exceedingly disappointed, for he had hoped to leave Captain Jack Benson at this corner on the block below the hotel.

The street was practically deserted there. Yet barely two minutes had passed when, about a block away, in the opposite direction from that of the hotel, Eph heard a quick little feminine scream.

Wheeling about, Somers saw something that aroused his blood.

A girl, or young woman, he could not tell which, at the distance, cowered back from a short, thick-set young man who had raised his hand to strike her.

The next instant Eph saw the blow fall. Again

the young woman cried out, though not very loudly. But the brute seemed on the point of once more striking her.

"Wow!" sputtered Eph, angrily. "We'll see about that."

On the run Somers went down the short block. The bully, hearing him come, turned for a look, then darted away down the side street.

"I—I beg your pardon," stammered Eph, as the young woman turned, flashing a look at him through a thin veil. "I—I don't want to interfere, but——"

"I'm very glad you did, sir," responded the young woman, in a voice whose sweetness charmed the submarine boy. "That wretch——"

"I wonder if I can overtake him and thrash him," pondered Eph, glancing down the side street. The bully had disappeared.

"Oh, don't think of that," begged the girl, in a quick, anxious way. "I don't want to set people's tongues to wagging."

"No; of course not," Eph assented, quickly.

"But, if you will escort me safe home——"

"Gladly, miss," nodded young Somers, again lifting his cap.

"Oh, that will be so kind of you," she murmured. "For I am afraid Tom might be waiting for me, on the way to my home——"

"If he gets within hailing distance," uttered Eph, valiantly, "I'll plant a torpedo fist under him!"

"Will you let me take your arm?" begged the girl; for, from her voice and her slight, trim figure, she appeared to be no more. That she was indeed afraid was testified to by the way in which her hand trembled on his arm. It was such a tender little hand, too! Eph was not a flirt. He did not give much thought to girls, as a rule, but he wasn't going to see one struck by a street bully.

So he walked along, down the side street, turning, also, at two or three other corners, talking cheerily to make the girl forget her late fright. Her face Eph couldn't see very well, on account of the veil, but he decided that the young woman possessed beautiful, flashing eyes, as he caught their expression dimly through the veil.

Down another quiet side street they were passing, when they came to the head of an alley-way. Just as they reached it the girl let go of Eph's arm, uttering a little scream as she darted away.

Eph didn't follow her. He found himself face to face with the thick set young man, Tom. Just back of that worthy were two other sturdy-looking young hoodlums.

"Now, you an' me have got something to settle, younker," glared Tom.

"All right," retorted Eph, undauntedly. "But fair play—one at a time."

Eph's fists were up, and he sailed in, fighting manfully, sailor-fashion. Then the other two closed in behind young Somers. He was struck on the back of the head, and darkness came over him and he fell insensible to the ground.

When luckless Eph came to his senses he found himself lying, bound hand and foot, on a pile of rags. The darkness around him was complete.

"Well, this is a puzzle to unravel!" muttered the astounded submarine boy.

Yet, think and ponder as he would, it never occurred to him to see, in his misfortune, the guiding hand of Fred Radwin!

CHAPTER VIII

ONE, TWO, THREE—A FULL BAG!

AT the hot soda place even Jack Benson, fond as he was of such decoctions, at last had his fill.

"Funny Eph hasn't brought the others here," muttered Jack.

"Pardon me, a moment," urged Radwin, rising. "I'll be back directly."

Radwin slipped out to the sidewalk, for he

had seen a hovering figure at the curb. However, Radwin kept on down the street, turning in at the third doorway beyond. Now, the hovering figure sauntered past.

"We got the cub," whispered the prowler.

"Good!" whispered Radwin. "Then you're ready for the rest?"

"Huh! It'll be like sleeping on a haymow, if the other two are as easy as that one was."

"All right, then! Be off, and see that you do your work well!"

With that Radwin walked briskly back and into the hot soda place.

"I'm ashamed to tell you what took me out," he laughed, easily. "Boys, after writing that letter in the drug-store, I forgot to mail it, and just felt it in my coat pocket. Well, it's safe in the mail-box, at last."

"We were just saying," Hal announced, "that it's funny the others haven't come along. Hadn't we better go back and get Eph, anyway?"

"It will be a good idea," nodded Radwin.

Of course, when they reached the corner at which they had left young Somers, he was not there.

"I wonder if he has gone back and joined the party at the hotel?" queried Hal.

"We can soon find out," declared Jack.

"Suppose you and I walk down there, then, Hastings?" suggested Radwin. "We can leave Benson here, to tell Somers where we are, if he comes back this way."

"You wait here, Hal," suggested Jack. "There's a little matter I want to speak to Mr. Farnum about, anyway."

So Hastings was left at the corner. He saw Jack and the Rhinds man go in through the hotel entrance.

Then, hearing steps, Hal turned to see two sailors approaching. They wore the uniform of the United States Navy. Hastings regarded them with the friendly interest that he, like most other Americans, always felt for sailors. But the two sailors came along, talking earnestly, and did not appear to see young Hastings, who stood in close to the wall.

"When I first seen him fall," one of the sailors was saying, "I mistook him for a Navy officer. He was pretty young, but the uniform fooled me."

"He had the uniform, all right but no signs of rank on it," nodded the other sailor, thoughtfully. "Was he much hurt?"

"Oh, it won't kill him," replied the first sailor. "But——"

"I beg your pardon," interposed Hal, springing in front of the pair. "It has just struck

me that you are speaking of a comrade of mine."

"Well, he had a uniform on, just like your'n," replied the first sailor, looking Hal Hastings over quickly.

"Only the young feller we're talkin' about has red hair," added the second.

"What has happened to him?" demanded Hal, a feeling of alarm sweeping over him.

"Oh, he got in a little fight—that's all," responded the first sailor. "Bit off a little bit bigger chunk of fight than he could handle. He's kinder dazed and silly, now, and talkin' about queer things. Half an hour more, though, messmate, and I guess he'll be able to walk down to the water front all right."

Eph knocked out and dazed—among strangers! That was the sole picture that appeared to Hal Hastings's mind at that moment.

"He's a friend of mine—messmate, at that," Hal declared, quickly. "Where is the place? Or, better still, can you take me to it? I'll reward you."

"Oh, stow the reward, messmate," replied one of the sailors. "We fellers that foller sea-fighting for a trade have got to stand in together once in a while. When I seen your friend knocked down I jumped in and floored the big rough that hurt your messmate. We'd have

brought your friend along, but we didn't know just where to take him."

It was hard for Hal to believe that clear-eyed, level-headed Eph Somers would go into any of the low drinking resorts of the town; but he thought it best not to ask any questions until he found young Somers.

After some two minutes of brisk walking the two sailors turned down into an alleyway.

"The place we're going to is dark on the ground floor," stated one of them. "Don't be afraid to go up a dark stairway, messmate. We'll be with you, anyway."

"I don't believe I'm afraid, thank you," smiled Hal.

One of the sailors, stepping ahead, pushed a door open, going in first. Hal followed, the other sailor bringing up the rear.

Then, like a flash, Hal Hastings felt himself seized on that dark stairway, and a big hand held over his mouth.

Like a tiger Hal fought for a few moments. As nearly as he could judge, in the dark, he had four assailants. He was overborne, at last, gagged and tied.

In the meantime Jack and Mr. Radwin had gone to the hotel dining room, to find that the last diners had departed, leaving only a few waiters who were arranging tables.

"No one here," murmured Radwin. "Then we'll look through the billiard room, writing room and other places. Young Somers must be with the party somewhere."

Twenty minutes or more they spent in looking through the various public parts of the big hotel. Then they returned to the lobby. Radwin was limping, now, and looked uncomfortable.

"What's the matter?" questioned Jack.

"A nail in my shoe hurts me," lied the other, glibly, sinking into a chair. "Benson, I reckon I'll sit here a few minutes. Then I'll get to my room and call a bell-boy, to see if he can find some one to fix the shoe."

"Too bad," murmured Jack. "But say, I'll go back to the corner, and tell Hal, so he won't be standing on the corner all night."

With that Jack Benson walked briskly out. Up at the next corner, however, instead of finding Hal, the young skipper was accosted by two sailors in United States naval uniform.

"I reckon your name's Benson, messmate?" hailed one of the pair.

"I reckon it is," nodded Jack, looking sharply at them.

"Got a bit of bad news for you, then," added the first speaker. "It ain't so awful bad, though. One of your friends—Winter, I think his name was——"

"No; Somers," corrected the other sailor.

"Well, he saw a row going on, and he had to run down the street and get into it. Too many fellers in the fight, and Winter——"

"Somers," interposed the second sailor.

"Yes; that was it. Somers got pretty badly used up. His scalp was cut some considerable. He was taken into a house nearby, and a doctor called in to stitch him up. Somers sent us to find his messmates. We found your friend, Hastings, and took him around there. Hastings wanted us to find you, and bring you there, messmate."

"Poor old Eph!" muttered Jack. "Tough luck, and at a bad time for us."

"We'll take you 'round to where your messmates are," volunteered the sailor. "Hastings was particular that you come at once."

"I'll get a carriage to bring Mr. Somers home in," Jack suggested.

"Oh, your messmate, Hastings, has sent a feller for a carriage," broke in the first sailor, hastily.

"Good enough," Jack nodded. "Then say, boys, I'll just run back to the hotel. I left Radwin in there. I'll be right back with you. You'll wait for me, surely, won't you?"

"Oh, sure!" chorused both sailors. Then, as Jack Benson scurried down the street, the two

supposed sailors turned to each other, chuckling softly.

"Sure we'll wait!" repeated one of the pair.

It was several minutes ere Jack returned, coming up almost breathlessly.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, boys," he spoke, hastily. "But I'm here at last."

"Oh, that's all right, messmate. Come along and we'll pilot you straight to your friend, Winter——"

"Somers," corrected the other sailor.

Between the pair, some two minutes later, Jack Benson turned off a side street into an alleyway. The houses down in this alley were dark. Most of the little buildings here were occupied only in the daytime, as junkshops and old rag stores.

"Don't mind the dark," spoke one of the sailors, as he pushed open a door. "There's light enough on the second floor. That's where you'll find your friend, Winter."

"Somers," remonstrated the second sailor.

On the dark stairway Jack Benson found himself suddenly attacked, not only by the sailor pair, but by at least two other men, as well.

CHAPTER IX

BUT SOMETHING HAPPENED NEXT

"OH, you——" Jack shot out, hoarsely, as he felt himself borne under by crushing weight.

"Go easy, messmate, and you'll sleep more peaceful to-night!" chuckled one of the sailors, holding a big hand over the submarine boy's mouth, while another unseen assailant pinned Jack's hands at the wrists.

Flare! A sudden glow of light illumined the dark hallway. Then more light.

"Jerushy!" howled one of the sailor pair, leaping to his feet.

Instantly there was consternation among all the assailants.

In the excitement young Benson was forgotten. Freed from assault, he leaped to his feet.

The flare of light had come from two bull's-eye police lanterns, held in the open doorway below.

"There are the scoundrels, men! Grab them!" shouted a voice of authority.

The speaker and two other men were in police uniforms. Four other men there were in ordinary civilian garb.

In the excitement Jack Benson let his fist fly, knocking one of the sailors headlong down the stairs. But the submarine boy did not pause there. His other fist, landed on the second sailor, sending him after the first.

"Club their heads off, if any of 'em put up a fight," commanded the police officer in charge.

Two other men, not in sailors' uniform cowered on the stairs, close to the young submarine captain. There was no fight, beyond the blows that young Benson struck. Cowed by the unexpected appearance of the law's force, the quartette of rascals surrendered. There was a clicking of handcuffs.

"Your chief thought I was crazy, or telling him fairy stories over the telephone," laughed Captain Jack Benson. "Now, I guess——"

"I am the Chief of police," retorted the officer in authority. "I thought that, if anything such as you described were happening in Colfax, then I'd better come along myself to investigate. But now, perhaps you can explain more than you did over the 'phone from the Somerset House?"

"I have the best of reasons," Jack replied, "for imagining that two of my friends have disappeared by the same trick that was tried on me. If that is so, I'm mighty anxious to find them as soon as possible."

"Do any of you scoundrels know where this young gentleman's friends are?" demanded the chief, turning to glare at his prisoners, lined up along the wall in the lower hallway. "The man that talks quickly now may get off easier than the rest, later on."

"There's two boys bound and gagged in the sub-cellar of this place," spoke one of the two prisoners not in uniform.

"Good enough," nodded the chief of police, looking at the informant. "Officer Davis, you come with me. You may come, too, Mr. Benson. The rest of you wait where you are."

The door to the cellar was locked, but the police chief, with a skeleton key, soon had the lock forced. Passing down into the cellar, their way lighted by one of the bull's-eye lanterns, they found a trap opening upon a stairway down into the sub-cellar below.

Here they came upon Hal and Eph, both securely bound and gagged, and lying on piles of old rags. It was not long ere the two submarine boys were free and on their feet, wholly overjoyed.

"Great Scott! How did you ever find us here?" quivered Eph Somers.

"I'll tell you when we get away from here," smiled Skipper Jack.

Up the stairs they went. One of the police

party, in the meantime, had gone out to telephone for a covered police van. Into this the four prisoners were hustled and locked securely in.

Those of the police party who did not go with the van soon vanished, all save Chief Ward.

"Now, Captain Benson," muttered the chief of police, "I want to congratulate you on your clever wit and sound judgment. I also want to thank you for enabling me to run down a gang like that. I fully understand that, in the morning, you have to be away on a very important submarine test, and that it would be wholly inconvenient for you to have to appear in court. So I won't expect you. On the testimony that my men and I can give the judge will continue the case until such time as you can appear. My men already understand that none of the prisoners are to be allowed to communicate with outside friends to-night or to-morrow morning. So you may be sure that no news of their arrest will leak out. And now, good-night, boys. Congratulations, again, and thanks!"

Nor were Jack Benson and his friends long in vanishing, either. They did not go back at all by the way of the Somerset House. They went down to the water-front by a different route. Yet they were fortunate enough to find a shore boat that put them out on board the "Benson."

"And now, Jack, old fellow," exploded Eph, as they sat in the snug security of their little cabin, "don't you dare think of anything else until you tell us how you brought a seeming miracle about."

"Oh, that was easy," laughed Jack Benson, gleefully. "In the first place, it was mighty queer, Eph, that we left you on that corner—and you vanished. Then we left Hal on that same corner—and the earth swallowed him up. Then two fake sailors stopped me at that very same corner——"

"How did you know they were fake sailors?" broke in Hal. "I never suspected their genuineness."

"Why, see here," glowed Jack, "a United States man-of-warsman has respect for an officer's uniform drilled into him twenty-four hours in the day. We're not officers of the Navy, but we wear a uniform that is very much like the uniform of a naval officer, all but the insignia of rank. What is the consequence? Every sailor we meet sees the uniform, and says 'sir' to us by sheer force of habit. Why, you both know that a good many sailors who pass us give us the regular salute. Yet these two fake sailors hailed me as 'messmate' and were as familiar in every other way as they knew how to be."

"Gracious! When they spoke to me, I

never thought of that little point," confessed Hal.

"So I told the pretended sailors," continued Captain Jack, "that I'd run down to the hotel, and that I'd be right back."

"Did you tell anyone where you were going?" demanded Eph.

"No one was there that I knew. Instead, I slipped into the telephone room, at the side of the lobby, and called up the chief of police. I happened to get the chief himself on the wire. He thought I was a drunken sailor, or else that I was out of my head. But he finally agreed to have some detectives on hand to see the sailors take me away in tow."

"Then——?" pursued Eph.

"Why, then I waited long enough to give the detectives a chance to reach the scene. Then I went back and walked into the trap with the fake sailors."

It was a story that was hugely enjoyed by the young submarine captain's comrades.

"But who would put up such a queer job on us?" demanded Hal.

"It must be some one who didn't want us to man a Pollard boat in to-morrow's speed test, of course," nodded Jack. "It seems like a mean thing to say, and we ought to be sure, but I believe Rhinds and Radwin are the offenders."

The more the submarine boys talked it over, the more they were inclined to fall in line with the guess that Rhinds and Radwin had been behind their troubles.

"Some one has got to suffer for this business, before we get through!" cried Captain Jack, his eyes flashing ominously. "But come, now, fellows, we must go to bed, for we must have enough sleep if we're to be good and fit in tomorrow's race."

It was rather late, that evening when Messrs. Farnum and Pollard, still with John C. Rhinds, returned to the Somerset House.

"I don't see our youngsters about, anywhere," muttered Jacob Farnum. "But their room keys are gone from the clerk's rack, so I guess they've turned in, like sensible fellows."

They did not know that Radwin himself had secretly removed the keys in order to create the impression that the boys were in bed.

Rhinds and Radwin talked in whispers, behind the locked door of another room. They chuckled a long while, then shook hands and went to bed.

The boys, however, as we know, were safely aboard the submarine.

Mr. Farnum had left a call for eight o'clock in the morning. It was about twenty minutes

later that Farnum and Pollard knocked loudly on the door of the room occupied by Rhinds.

"Well?" demanded Mr. Rhinds, opening the door, and appearing, minus coat and vest. "Ah, good morning, gentlemen. Going down to breakfast? I'll be ready in a few moments."

"Breakfast—nothing!" retorted Jacob Farnum, sharply. "Our young men are missing. We went to their rooms this morning, and could get no answer. We've had their doors opened with pass-keys—our three young submarine officers haven't been in their beds all night long!"

John C. Rhinds allowed his face to express more surprise than concern over this news.

"Oh, well," he remarked, "boys will be boys, you know—especially when they're sailors."

"Our boys are not that sort," retorted Mr. Farnum, sharply. "They are not hoodlums or racketers."

"Then of course you'll find 'em safe on one of your boats," proposed Mr. Rhinds, innocently. "Just two minutes, and I'll go down to breakfast with you."

Radwin, too, joined them. He also expressed surprise, artfully. All four went to the breakfast room together. Messrs. Farnum and Pollard ate well enough, though they seemed badly worried.

"There's just one thing about it, of course,"

sighed Jacob Farnum, as the party left the table. "If our youngsters are not on one of our boats, then we've got to lose the speed race to-day. None of us can handle the boats the way they do."

"Oh, you'll find the boys all right on one of the boats," asserted Fred Radwin, confidently.

The rivals went down to the water front together. It was well after nine o'clock when they entered a shore boat.

"We'll go out to your craft, first," proposed Mr. Rhinds, "You'll feel so much better, gentlemen, when you find your crew all right. I'll feel better, too, for I wouldn't want to beat you unfairly to-day."

Grant Andrews and two of his workmen stood on the platform deck of the "Benson," leaning against the conning tower, when the shore boat came within hail.

"I am afraid to call out to Grant, and ask him," faltered the shipbuilder.

"Then don't do it," returned Mr. Rhinds, sympathetically. "Just wait until we get alongside, and you'll see your young men popping out of the conning tower, rested and as bright as new buttons."

A moment later the shore boat rounded in alongside. Then, quite suddenly, the three submarine boys projected themselves through the

manhole, and stood in full view on the platform deck.

"Eh? Hey?" gasped John C. Rhinds, utterly nonplussed.

Fred Radwin's lower jaw seemed to drop several inches. He stared as though he were seeing ghosts, while a sickly, greenish pallor crept into his handsome face.

"By Jove, you were right, Rhinds!" gasped Jacob Farnum, turning. "Thank you, old man, for keeping our courage up."

"Good morning, Mr. Farnum! Good morning, Mr. Pollard!" chorused the three submarine boys. Then, favoring Rhinds and Radwin with brief glances:

"Good morning—*gentlemen!*"

"Gentlemen?" repeated Eph, disgustedly, under his breath. "I think not!"

Though Rhinds and his agent speedily managed to look pleasant, they hadn't gotten their spirits back when the shore boat pulled away.

Farnum and Pollard went hurriedly below, where Jack and his comrades followed.

"Jack! Jack! Thank you a million times!" gasped Farnum, seizing the young captain's hand, then giving the other boys the same hearty gripping handshake. "Your note that we got, this morning, gave us the information we needed and we knew just how to act."

"And, from the way Rhinds and his fellow acted, when they caught sight of you boys," added David Pollard, "we can form a pretty good idea of who tried to shanghai you three last night."

"The scoundrels!" glowered Farnum, in righteous rage.

"Now, sir," cried Jack, laughing savagely, "why did those fellows try such a trick on us? Because they hoped, thereby, to beat us in the distance speed race to-day."

"Of course," nodded the shipbuilder, still savage. "Rhinds builds fast submarines. I know that, from the reports I've had. Plainly, the Pollard boats are the only craft he feels much afraid of."

"He'll be more than afraid, to-night," vaunted Jack Benson, proudly. "More than afraid, sir. When the figures of to-day's distance speed course are in John C. Rhinds will be frozen cold!"

"If we have to turn on gasoline and run the engines so hot we blow the whole deck off!" confirmed Hal Hastings, explosively.

"If I should be inclined to forget to-day," growled Eph Somers, "I have a pain in my head, from a crack I received last night, that will put me in mind of the whole outrage, and keep me strictly on the job of vengeance!"

"I guess you youngsters have the winning fire all right, for to-day," smiled Jacob Farnum, grimly.

"Are you going to enter both boats in to-day's race?" asked Jack, more thoughtfully.

"We can't," replied the shipbuilder. "Captain Magowan told me, last night, that, since the Rhinds people and ourselves are the only makers who have more than one boat here, to-day's race will be confined to one craft representative of each make. So, which boat do you prefer to take out to-day, Jack?"

"It doesn't make a bit of difference which one," returned young Captain Benson. "Between the 'Hastings' and the 'Benson' there isn't a hair's breadth to choose. But with either boat, sir, I believe that, to-day, we can run any Rhinds boat off the surface of the ocean!"

It was all very good to have such confidence in their boat. Yet was it to be justified?

* * * * * * * * * *

Almost immediately came the first blow. A telegram came on board, addressed to Williamson. The latter's brother was seriously ill at home, and the machinist had to leave at once, going north by the next train. As it happened, the brother speedily recovered, but this incident for the time left the Farnum forces the losers of a highly useful man in the engine room.

CHAPTER X

JOHN C. RHINDS ADVOCATES FAIR SPORT!

BOOM! From over the port rail of the "Oakland" a dense cloud of grayish-white smoke belched out.

Through it flashed a streak of red.

As the "Oakland" was the temporary flagship of this fleet of two gunboats, this gunfire was the signal for the submarines to move on out of the bay.

Lieutenant Danvers had already come over to the "Benson" from the flagship. Danvers bore with him the orders of the naval board. Moreover, the lieutenant was to remain on the Pollard craft that day. Each submarine that was entered for the race had a naval officer on board, who was to give directions, at need, and to act as judge of conduct.

"Just get under way easily, and move out, Mr. Benson," advised Danvers. "Eight or nine miles will be fast enough to go."

Jack and the naval officer stood by the platform deck steering wheel as the "Benson" left her moorings.

Back by the conning tower stood Messrs. Farnum and Pollard. Eph was below, until

otherwise needed, to render Hal any necessary help in the engine room.

"There goes the Rhinds boat!" called Mr. Farnum, as one of the other submarines left her moorings, making for sea in the wake of the "Chelsea," which gunboat was to act as the starter's boat for that day.

"What's the name of that particular Rhinds boat?" asked Jack.

"The 'Zelda'," replied Lieutenant Danvers.

"Nice, lady-like name for a fighting boat," mocked Jack.

"You don't seem to like the Rhinds people," hinted the naval officer.

"I don't," Jack admitted, bluntly.

"Well, I suppose it isn't human nature to be fond of our rivals," assented the naval officer, slowly.

"I've other reasons, of my own, for disliking Rhinds," muttered the submarine boy.

"He hasn't what you could call a wholesome face," smiled Danvers. "In fact, I think Mr. Rhinds must be a self-made man, made very badly. I can't quite think that he has anything of the human face divine."

Jack laughed, but bitterly.

"The 'Zelda' is the boat we have to beat today," he added.

"I wonder if you'll do it?" muttered Lieuten-

ant Danvers, gazing suddenly over at the "Zelda," now well ahead and cutting a white path of foam. "Great guns, look at her go!"

Jack did glance up and ahead. He felt a sinking at heart, for the moment. For the "Zelda" was showing a burst of speed that was calculated to make any rival thoughtful.

"Mr. Farnum," Jack called back, "will you pass the word for Hal to come on deck?"

Young Hastings was up in a moment!

"They're forcing that boat," muttered Hal, gazing after the "Zelda" uneasily. "I can overtake her, though, Jack, if you say the word."

"Do you think so?" asked Lieutenant Danvers, dubiously.

"Don't try it, Hal," Jack advised, quietly. "Save all overheated pistons and other parts for the final test."

The "Zelda" was now well ahead of the "Chelsea," which was putting out at cruising speed only.

Too-oot! toot! toot! sounded sharply, hoarsely, from the deep throat of the "Chelsea's" whistle.

"Good enough," muttered Lieutenant Danvers. "They've ordered the Rhinds scooter to slow down and fall into line behind the gunboat."

"I'm sorry," muttered Hal.

"Why?" asked the naval lieutenant.

"I wish they had let old Rhinds go ahead and get all his machinery red-hot at the outset."

Then, slowly shaking his head, Hal Hastings went back to his post.

"Do you really think we can beat that scooter to-day, Hal?" inquired the shipbuilder, anxiously.

"Yes, sir."

"What makes you so certain, lad?"

"Why, we'll beat her just because we've got to do it, sir," Hastings replied, then hurried below.

"Hal isn't any too sure," muttered David Pollard, restlessly. "Neither am I. Jake, we have a strong fight to make to-day. Somehow, Rhinds has managed to put a pretty lively engine in that boat of his. I had an idea she'd be two or three miles an hour slower."

"Probably we haven't been shown anything like the 'Zelda's' best speed, yet," replied Farnum, moodily.

Building and trying out submarine torpedo boats is the kind of work to make many a man's hair turn prematurely white. As success depends solely upon actual showings made, the anxiety of any builder during a series of competitive tests in which several makes of boat are entered can be easily understood.

Messrs. Farnum and Pollard were plainly on tenterhooks that day. They might well be. Should the Rhinds boat carry away the honors on that day and on the subsequent days of the present tests, then Farnum and Pollard, who had their entire fortunes invested in this business, would have on their hands only so much scrap steel, brass and iron.

Nor would Jack and his comrades fare any better. If the boys were vanquished, Farnum and Pollard would have no more work for them. No other submarine company would want the services of losers.

"Keep your nerve to-day, won't you, Benson?" asked Lieutenant Danvers, in a low tone.

"Why?" queried Jack, with the ghost of a smile, as he glanced into the naval officer's face. "Have I been showing any nervousness?"

"Not yet, and I don't want you to."

"Are you as interested as that in us, Mr. Danvers?"

"I like you, Benson—like you from the deck up, and I don't want to see you lose a single point in the game. That's all."

Eph Somers came on deck, presently.

"Hal says he doesn't need me below for the present, Jack, so I came up to relieve you at the wheel. I don't want to see your steering wrist going stale when the race starts, so you'd bet-

ter let me have the wheel, while you keep yourself fresh for the real work."

"As the race hasn't begun yet," broke in Lieutenant Danvers, "there is no impropriety in my taking the wheel out to the start, if you'll trust me to handle your boat."

"Trust a naval officer?" laughed Jack Benson, flashing a smile of gratitude at the lieutenant. "That's a funny idea to suggest."

Danvers took the wheel silently, then devoted his whole thought, apparently, to the—for him—simple task that he had in hand.

Outside the bay the "Chelsea" signaled to the submarine boats to slow up. Then the gunboat moved over to temporary anchorage. A line between the gunboat's bow and the lighthouse on Groton Point, to the northward, was to furnish the imaginary starting line. This line the five competing submarine torpedo boats must, at second gunfire, cross as nearly together as possible. There were penalties, of course, for any one boat trying to steal a lead over the rest.

By this time the fast gunboat "Oakland," which had a safe speed of twenty-four knots an hour, under forced draught, lay to, some two miles further out. The "Oakland's" task was to stick close to the leaders, and, at the end, to decide which craft had won.

Boom! The first gun sounded over the starboard side of the "Chelsea." In five minutes' time the second gun would thunder out—and the racers would be off!

Such a scurrying as there was then among these five little craft of war!

Captain Jack Benson had the wheel again. Henceforth, Lieutenant Danvers was to be but a spectator—a judge, at need, and on his honor, as an officer of the United States Navy, to show no partiality to those on whose boat he found himself.

As Eph might be needed on deck, at any instant, he stood leaning against the conning tower.

David Pollard was missing. He had gone below, had taken off his coat, and was standing in shirt-sleeves, ready to render any possible aid to Hal Hastings, the young chief engineer on whom so much depended in the six hours to come.

Now that one of the supreme moments in his career had come, Jacob Farnum hardly dared breathe. He said not a word to Eph, who, just as anxious, stood at his elbow.

As the submarine craft scurried over the waves, each seeking its best place for a start over the line, the "Zelda" came up within sixty yards, running alongside for a moment or two.

John C. Rhinds, standing at the rail of his

own craft, with what was intended to be a smile on his face, waved his hat wildly at Jacob Farnum.

"Good luck to you, Farnum—and to us!" bellowed Rhinds. "Of course, I'd like to win to-day, but if you've the better boat, go ahead and leave us at the finish. May the best craft win, and no hard feelings! Fair sport all the way through, Farnum, old man! And to you, Benson—may you never be in fitter shape than to-day!"

"The old hypocrite!" gasped Jack, vengefully. "I'm mighty sorry I can't head this boat around and run it straight down his lying throat!"

"Then he'd surely gobble you up!" laughed Lieutenant Danvers. "But be careful, lad! Don't let vengeful thoughts get into your head and stick to-day. You've got to keep yourself cool and your nerve steady. Look out, now, for the second gun!"

All five of the submarines were manœuvring for the starting line.

Boom! The second gun roared out, and the six hours' speed and endurance test was on!

CHAPTER XI

THE STRAIN OF RED-HOT METAL

FIRST over the line passed the "Zelda," but it was a fair get-away. How her propellers churned the foam now!

Just as it happened, and through no fault of handling, Jack Benson got the Pollard craft over the line third. At the outset, therefore, his boat was distanced some twenty-four seconds by the leader.

"Steady, now!" called Jacob Farnum, in low tones. "We've six hours in which to make up a few seconds."

If Captain Jack heard, he gave no sign.

For the next few minutes the youthful commander seemed to forget everything but the wheel under his hand, and the course and speed of the craft he commanded.

That the "Benson" was slowly losing was not, at first, clear to anyone on board. It took time to draw out the increasing lead of the other craft, but, after a while, it became more and more evident.

True, the "Benson" was second in the line—but the "Zelda" was first.

At the end of an hour there were drops of

clammy ooze on Captain Jack's forehead. He was steering as well as he had ever steered in his life. Hal had sent up word that the "Benson's" engines were doing all that could fairly be required of them.

That troublesome hour up, Captain Jack called to Eph to take the helm.

A few moments later the youthful commander appeared again on the platform deck, carrying a range-finder on a tripod. Through the telescope he took some rapid sights, then did some quick figuring. When he looked up Benson saw Jacob Farnum standing within four feet of him. The shipbuilder's face looked gray and haggard.

"How much?" asked Jacob Farnum.

"Shade more than a quarter of a mile in the lead of us, sir," Jack replied.

"Have you been down to talk to Hal?"

"What's the use, sir?" demanded Jack. "Hal Hastings knows how much depends on speed. He's doing everything that his engineer's conscience will allow. Besides, David Pollard is there with him, sir."

"I've no orders to give," Jacob Farnum sighed, stepping back. "You youngsters know what you're about, and how much depends upon our success to-day."

Indeed, Jack Benson knew! As he silently

took his place at the wheel again deep lines appeared in his youthful face. He knew, this forenoon, what it meant to suffer.

At the end of the second hour, Jack again called Eph to take a short relief trick at the wheel. But Jack, instead of resting, promptly placed the range-finder. As he tried to adjust the telescope the submarine boy's hands shook. Jack glanced over at Lieutenant Danvers, cool and impassive. Danvers knew all about working that range-finder. But the naval officer was aboard as an official spectator. If the lieutenant aided in any way, then the Pollard submarine would be disqualified.

Jack's work was more slow, this time. It was some moments before he had the new range figured out.

"How far astern of the 'Zelda' are we now?" called Jacob Farnum.

"A shade over a half a mile."

"Whew! And the race only a third run."

"In other words," went on the young captain, "the Rhinds boat is gaining steadily on us at the rate of a quarter of a mile an hour. Not much, yet enough to win the race beyond any dispute."

"Can't we catch up over that distance?" asked Jacob Farnum.

"Not now, anyway, sir."

Jack went back beside the wheel. Somehow, he did not feel like taking the spokes into his own hands. Instead, he wheeled, silently, going back, through the conning tower, and down to the engine room.

"How do we stand with the Rhinds craft?" asked David Pollard, who sat on one of the cushioned seats in the engine room.

"Half a mile behind, sir."

Pollard got up slowly, then went through and up the stairs to the deck.

For some moments Hal and Jack talked together, in low tones. Both looked rather glum, until Hal suggested something that sent a little ray of hope into Benson's eyes.

"We'll see," muttered the young captain. "It looks like a forlorn hope, though, Hal."

At the end of the third hour the "Zelda" had added another quarter mile to the lead, while the "Oakland" showing the way, was a good mile ahead of the foremost racer.

When four hours had gone by the Rhinds boat was discovered to be just about a mile ahead of her nearest competitor. The Seawold boat, third in line, was half a mile behind the "Benson," and the Blackson boat, last of all, was two miles behind the Pollard boat's stern. But Jack and his friends had long ago ceased to feel any interest in the tail-enders.

The race was to be over at five o'clock. At half-past three, or four hours and a half after the start, Jack found, by the help of the range-finder, that the Rhinds boat led by a mile and an eighth.

"Keep the wheel, Eph!" called the young commander. "Steer as straight as you can. I'll be up soon."

Then Jack Benson darted below, though his legs trembled a bit under him.

"All ready, Hal!" shouted the youthful commander. "Play our one trump card, and play it as hard as you can! Though I'm afraid Rhinds has just such a card in his own pack."

Then up to the platform deck hastened Jack Benson. He moved quietly to the wheel, taking it from Eph. The young captain did not propose to leave again until the race was over.

Soon after this something happened that must have made those aboard the Rhinds boat feel uneasy. The "Benson" began to crawl up on the "Zelda."

"What are you doing now, Jack?" called Jacob Farnum sharply, as he and Pollard moved forward to stand by the young captain.

"I'll tell you, in a few minutes, if our move seems to be any good, sir," Jack answered.

By four o'clock half the space between the Rhinds boat and the Pollard craft had been

covered. By this time two men were observed aft on the "Zelda," their gaze turned steadily on the "Benson."

"Take the wheel for two or three minutes, Eph," begged the young captain, on whom the strain was beginning to tell.

Then, turning to his employers, Jack went on:

"The way Hal and I figured it out, sir, the 'Benson' is really the faster boat. But the Rhinds people may have been overheating their engines—slightly, systematically, and using a lot of water to cool the metal. Now, if that is the case, they may be doing their best at forced speed. Hal and I determined, if we didn't lose more than a quarter of a mile an hour, we'd rather let the 'Zelda' keep the lead, and go on slowly overheating her engines. But now, in the last hour and a half of the race, Hal is up to the same trick. If that has been the case with the 'Zelda,' and they now, at this late hour, go to any greater lengths in overheating, they're likely to blow the engines out of their hull. But we can stand the present speed, with its gradual overheating, up to the finish time for the race. If both boats keep going at the speed they're using now, and neither has an accident, we stand to come in half a mile in the lead."

"Good strategy, that, Jack!" cried Jacob Farnum, his eyes gleaming. "To let the other fellow take the risk of overheating his machinery all day, while we do it only in the last part of the race. My boy, I'm hopeful we may win yet."

"So am I, sir," muttered Benson. "Still, there's the risk that John C. Rhinds may have something more up his sleeve. We'll know before long, anyway."

By twenty minutes past four the "Benson" was almost close enough to the other submarine to throw a biscuit across the intervening space, had any on board the Pollard craft been inclined that way.

John C. Rhinds stood by the starboard rail of his own craft, regarding the rival with anxious eyes. But Jack knew the rascal to be so wily that the look of anxiety might be feigned.

Up, nearer and nearer! Jack was moving to the starboard of the "Zelda," as the "Oakland" was on that same side of the course.

"The old wretch isn't shouting out anything about fair play and good luck to us, now," muttered Jack, vengefully, as, at half-past four, the two craft ran neck and neck, but little over a hundred yards apart.

Then the "Benson" began to forge ahead.

The "Zelda" still hung on, but she was plainly in second place.

David Pollard hurried below, to see what he could do to help Hal Hastings in this supreme crisis.

"We're leaving her right behind," rang Jack Benson's voice, exultantly. "The 'Zelda's' old speed was her best, even at overheating. If nothing happens, now, we'll go in first!"

Interest, now, led those on the "Benson's" deck aft. Eph, being at the wheel, could be trusted not to look around, but to keep his eyes straight on the gunboat mark ahead.

John C. Rhinds could be seen, hanging limply over the rail of the "Zelda," his straining vision turned ahead. But he was being left more and more to the rear.

Boom! The sound came suddenly over the water, at last. All hands aft on the "Benson" ran forward, to find the "Oakland" swinging around so that her bow pointed the path for the leading submarine.

Eph remained at the wheel, steering steadily. He carried the "Benson" past the gunboat's bow, some seventy yards away. A cheer went up from the sailors crowding forward on the gunboat's spar deck. The cheer would have sounded, no matter which submarine had won.

Then Eph cut a wide circle, coming back close to the gunboat.

"You win!" shouted an officer at the "Oakland's" rail.

"Of course," nodded Lieutenant Danvers. "But what distance?"

"The board allows you half a mile and a furlong."

Captain Jack Benson, now that the strain was over, felt as though the platform deck were sinking under him.

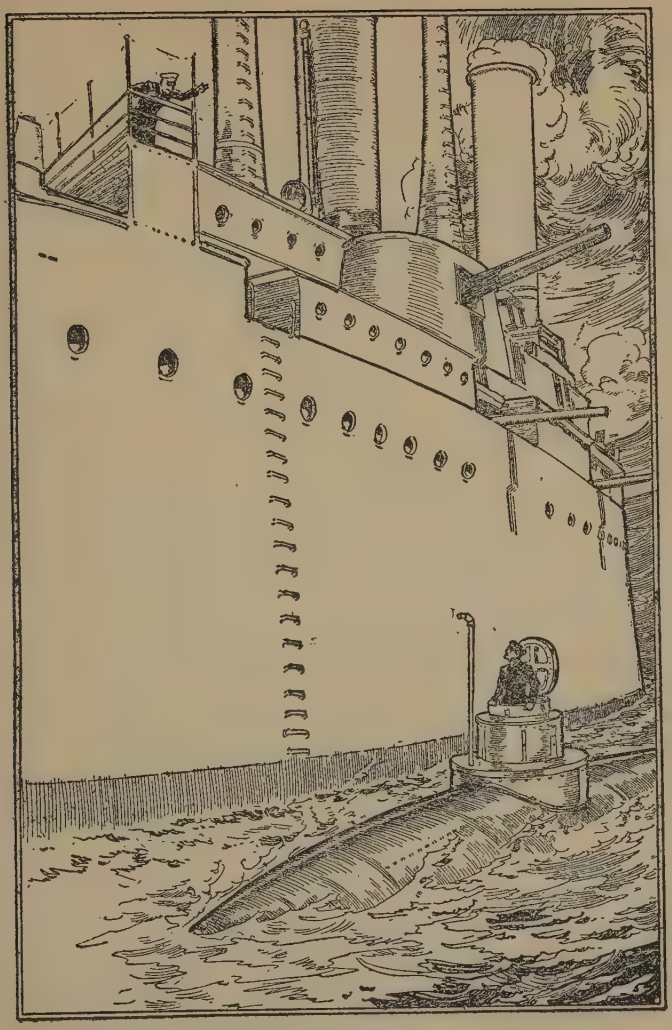
"Let me have that wheel," commanded Jacob Farnum, stepping forward. "Jack, you and Eph, below with you! Coffee, steak—and anything else—for all three of you youngsters!"

CHAPTER XII

LET A SAILOR STICK TO HIS DECK

IT was after midnight when the "Benson," first in, went to her moorings. Grant Andrews and two of his men came on board, to stand guard over the little sea-terror.

It was after one in the morning when the Seawold craft strayed into port. A little later came the "Chelsea" and the remaining submarines, for the gunboat had stood by the slower ones in case aid of any sort was needed.



You Win!

As the "Zelda" came to her moorings in the inky blackness John C. Rhinds stepped out upon her platform deck. Rhinds, after his disappointment, looked like a very old man. He paced back and forth, moodily, until his captain and crew had gone below. Then Rhinds turned, with a half snarl, when Fred Radwin, after lighting a cigar, stepped outside.

"Feeling glum?" asked Radwin, stupidly, as he gazed at his chief.

"A fool question that!" snapped the older man.

"It is, rather," admitted the younger man.

"Radwin, you're an idiot!"

"Thank you!"

"You told me you had those three Pollard boys taken care of—'canned' was the word you used. Yet, the first thing we saw, when we came out on the harbor, was those same boys, looking their finest. And they went into today's affair and beat us. We've lost the speed and endurance test."

"Those boys were trapped, all right," protested Radwin, in a low tone. "I can't begin to imagine how they ever got loose again."

"They got loose because you're a fool!" raged the older man.

"I'm good-natured, Mr. Rhinds," cried Radwin, an ugly gleam coming into his eyes, "but

I don't stand everything. You'll need me yet, so you'll do well to keep a civil tongue behind your teeth!"

"Stop that! Don't try any mighty airs on me!" quivered Rhinds.

"Oh, blow off your steam, quietly, and then become reasonable," yawned Fred Radwin. "First thing you know, you'll really make an enemy of me, and then the trick will be done, Rhinds. For you need me. Just now, you need me worse than you ever did in your life before."

"Need you?" sneered the other. "What for?"

"Well, for one thing, there are other tests ahead of the submarine boats."

"Can you win any of those tests?" jeered Rhinds, harshly.

"No; but I can do what will, perhaps, be the next best thing. I can stop the boys aboard the Pollard craft from being on hand to put their boat through all its paces. All you need is to have the Pollard end blocked. You can more than hold your end against the other submarines."

"Well, what can you do to stop the boys on the Pollard boats?" demanded Rhinds, unbelievingly.

"I can stop them from being on hand at the

next tests. Or else I can attend to them so that they'll be of very little use, anyway."

"Bah! You're dreaming, Fred! The boys were too smart for you last time. Now that they're on their guard, don't you realize they'd be harder than ever to catch."

"Jack Benson and his friends don't know that I was behind what happened last night," retorted Radwin. "Besides, if they're on their guard, now, so am I. I know them to be smarter than I first thought, so I shall spread a deeper, tighter net for them. John Rhinds, you shall win the rest of the submarine tests. At least, the Pollard boats won't win!"

Radwin talked so confidently that John Rhinds began to look at him more hopefully.

"What are you going to do, Fred?" the wretch inquired, at last.

"I'm going on shore—now."

"Everybody will know, if you call a boat at this hour of the night."

"Bosh! You and I are both going on shore —back to the Somerset House. Anything very strange about that?" demanded Radwin. "We're tired out from the day's cruise, and want to be off the water. So we're going to the Somerset. We'll drift in, get something to eat, and then start upstairs. You can hardly go to sleep, Rhinds, but I shall start out again,

on the sly, and go to find some handy people I know in the little city of Colfax. So that's settled, and I'll signal for the boat now."

Jack and his comrades slept on the "Benson" that night. For one thing, they felt so tired, after the day's long strain, that they really lacked the desire even to go to larger, softer beds on shore. So they awoke in the morning feeling as fresh as sea-larks should.

"There are no tests on for to-day, and nothing to be done on board, except to clean the engines," spoke Jacob Farnum over the breakfast table in the little cabin. "So, youngsters, we'll go ashore and refresh ourselves. Grant's men will clean the engines. That's what they're really here for."

"Don't you think it would be wiser, sir, to remain on board?" smiled Captain Jack. "As you will remember, we found the shore rather too lively the last time we were there."

"Things happened because you boys got out of our sight," chuckled the shipbuilder, quietly. "That's the point. What you youngsters need is a brace of guardians. So, while you're to go on shore, Dave and I will go along, and you're not to get out of our sight. Remember that."

"We'll be safe, then," nodded Eph, sagely. "I surely do want to stretch my legs, and take

a yawn or two where a sea-gull won't flap down my throat."

Of course, the idea of going on shore really appealed to all hands. So, half an hour later, a shore boat put off with them all, leaving Grant and his men still in charge.

"I wonder what the next test is going to be?" asked Jack.

"I shall have to refer you to the members of the naval board, and they won't tell until this evening," replied Mr. Farnum. "That's one of their rules—no news until the evening before. That prevents too much time being spent in preparation. One of the objects of these tests is to find out how well the different types of submarines can do things on short notice."

"That's right," nodded Captain Jack, thoughtfully. "Really, when you come to think of it, submarine torpedo boats are short-notice craft anyway."

"And, best of all, with no notice whatever to the enemy," broke in Eph. "In future wars it's going to give a good deal of comfort to a fellow to think that he serves on a submarine, instead of on a battleship."

"Where are you going to stop on shore, Jake?" inquired Pollard.

"At the Somerset," responded Mr. Farnum.

"Then we're likely to run into that Rhinds-Radwin crowd."

"We can stand it, if they can," replied Farnum, compressing his lips grimly. "Our consciences are cleaner than theirs."

Indeed, in passing from the lobby to the breakfast room, where the Pollard party intended to take coffee, Messrs. Rhinds and Radwin were encountered just as they were coming out.

"Ah, good morning, gentlemen," hailed John C. Rhinds, halting and holding out his hand. Fred Radwin, too, beamed cordially upon the enemy.

" 'Morning," replied Jacob Farnum, ignoring the outstretched hand of Rhinds. Radwin's ready-made smile, too, was overlooked, as the Pollard submarine party filed by into the breakfast room.

"I don't believe they'll waste any make-believe cordiality on us, after that," grimaced Mr. Pollard, as he dropped into a chair at a table.

Fifteen minutes later a stout, rather short, middle-aged man entered the breakfast room in haste. He spoke to the head waiter, who pointed out the table at which the submarine party sat.

Then the head waiter came over with a card and a letter which he handed to Farnum.

"'Mr. Walter C. Hodges,'" read Farnum, from the card. Then, glancing at the enevlope: "'Introducing Mr. Hodges.' It's from Judson, proprietor of the hotel where I stop when in Washington," continued the shipbuilder, as he glanced through the letter. "He asks me to extend any possible courtesies to Mr. and Miss Hodges, for whom he vouches cordially."

Rising, Mr. Farnum stepped over to meet Mr. Hodges, shaking hands with the stranger. Then the pair walked back to the table. Farnum quickly presented Mr. Hodges to the others.

"Judson asks me to extend to you any possible courtesies," pursued the shipbuilder. "I shall be very glad. Now, what can I do that will be most agreeable to you?"

"Why—er—er——" began Mr. Hodges, hesitatingly, "the thing that my daughter and I are most interested in is your line of boats. In fact, we came over to Colfax to see what we could of the boats and the tests. Now, my daughter and I would both like very much to go aboard one of your boats. Yet, if this would be at all irregular, or cause you any inconvenience, I beg you to refuse us, and we shall understand your refusal."

None the less, the shipbuilder did feel and look embarrassed.

"I wish it were anything else on earth," Far-

num replied, frankly. "For, though it gives me more pain than you can understand, my dear Mr. Hodges, it will be absolutely impossible for us to admit anyone to the submarine boats during the present tests."

"Then say no more about it," replied Mr. Hodges, pleasantly. "I can quite understand your position."

"There is just a bare chance, though," mused the shipbuilder, "that I might manage to obtain an invitation for your daughter and yourself to go out on one of the gunboats, and watch the submarine craft at their work."

"Fine!" cried Hodges, with enthusiasm. "Yet, if it will inconvience you in the least, Mr. Farnum, I beg you to give no further thought to it. Will you all, as soon as you are finished, come to the ladies' parlor with me? My daughter will be most delighted at meeting real submarine people."

"We are finished, now," replied Mr. Farnum, laying down his cigar, "and it will give us great pleasure to have the privilege of meeting Miss Hodges."

Though Hodges himself appeared a very common type of business man, and was plainly dressed, Miss Elinor Hodges proved to be a beautiful girl of about nineteen, and attired in the height of fashion.

She was, however, most charming and gracious, and evidently greatly interested in everything that had to do with submarine boats.

An hour's very pleasant chat followed in the ladies' parlor. Then Hodges, seeing an automobile pass one of the windows and halt before the ladies' entrance of the hotel, suddenly drew out his watch.

"Elinor, my dear, do you see the time?" demanded her father, holding out his watch. Then, as the submarine party rose, prepared to take their leave, Hodges turned to Farnum, explaining rapidly:

"Yes; unfortunately, we have an appointment, and must defer the further pleasure of seeing you until this evening. But that auto car outside, which I did not order for this hour, and, in fact, cannot use for to-day, gives me an idea. It is a car that I have hired for a week. Now, Elinor and I are not going to use the car. Mr. Farnum, can't you and your friends make use of the car to-day?"

Jacob Farnum would have tried to decline, pleasantly, fearing the acceptance of the use of the automobile might seem to bind him to extend courtesies on one of his boats. But Mr. Hodges was so gently, firmly insistent that, in a very short time, the submarine party found themselves seated in the car.

There was an abundance of room, for it was a seven-passenger car, large and roomy.

"This car is a whizzer, I understand," smiled Mr. Hodges, from the sidewalk.

"It certainly is, sir," agreed the chauffeur.

"Well, chauffeur, take my friends wherever they want to go to-day, and do whatever they want. Above all, when you get out on a country road, show 'em some of your high speed."

"Yes, sir."

Honk! honk! The car rolled away, going slowly enough through the city streets. Jacob Farnum, who sat in front with the driver, lighted a cigar and settled back to enjoy himself.

"Any particular place you want to go, sir?" asked the chauffeur.

"No," replied the shipbuilder. "You know the way around this part of the world better than we do. Take us out into the surrounding country, and show us anything you consider of interest."

"Yes, sir."

After a few minutes the car had left Colfax behind. They were out on the beginning of a country road, now. The chauffeur let out a few notches of speed.

"Smooth-running car," commented Mr. Farnum.

"Runs just as smoothly, sir, at sixty miles an hour," replied the man.

"When we get a little further out, you can show us some of that," smiled Mr. Farnum, contentedly.

"I will, sir."

"You boys afraid to go at sixty miles an hour?" asked the shipbuilder, turning to face those in the tonneau.

"Scared to death," laughed Jack Benson, gleefully.

As soon as the chauffeur considered that he had reached a little-enough-traveled part of the country road he let out the speed.

"My, but we're going some," called Farnum.

"Fifty miles," replied the chauffeur. "Now, I'll show you sixty."

The car seemed to leap forward. Then, it seemed to those in the tonneau as though they were beating any speed ever reached by an express train.

Whizz-zz! It was wild, exhilarating—dangerous!

"Say!" gasped Farnum. "If——"

That was as far as he got. The forward end of his side of the car sank to the ground. The car seemed trying to stand on its head.

Then it stopped, and all in it were hurled into the center of awful disaster.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TRICK IS EASILY SEEN THROUGH

IN the next instant all had settled.

There had been a brief moment in which the air around the wrecked auto had seemed full of flying human beings.

Now, they lay by the road side in varying degrees of disaster.

The left front axle had broken, the wheel rolling some yards ere it stopped.

Jacob Farnum, seated right over the axle, was hurled out, head first as nearly as he could afterwards guess. How he avoided landing on his head and sustaining a broken neck or shattered skull was one of those miraculous things that no one can explain.

The chauffeur had plunged out over Farnum's head, alighting beyond the shipbuilder. The chauffeur now lay writhing and groaning.

David Pollard landed first, on one wrist and his chest, a cry of anguish escaping him.

Eph Somers lay in the road motionless. Jack and Hal fell against the padded side of the car. Hal remained there during the next second, but young Benson turned a half-somersault, lightly, landing in the road just outside.

It was young Captain Jack who first got to his feet. Dazed for a few moments, he rose slowly seeking for signs of injury.

"I—I believe I'm not hurt," he congratulated himself. "Thank heaven for that, for there are others here who seem in need of the promptest help."

First of all Jack turned to his chum, young Hastings. But Hal, though his face was white from the shock of it all, smiled back, then helped himself out of the wrecked car.

Within the next few minutes it developed that Eph had been stunned. Beyond this he had suffered no injury except a bruise along the left thigh.

Jacob Farnum proved to be only stunned and badly shaken. But David Pollard displayed a helpless left wrist and complained of severe pain in the left side of his chest.

The chauffeur had a broken left leg, a broken arm, and a mass of bruises on his face, where he had struck the hard earth.

"Great Scott, but this is almost like the carnage of war!" muttered Jack Benson. "Hal, you and Eph help Mr. Farnum with the others. I'm going down the road to the first house, and send for aid."

Arrived at a farm-house that proved to be connected with the telephone service, Jack

'phoned for the two nearest doctors, and for men to come and help the injured. Then he called up the garage from which the auto had been hired; this address being supplied by the chauffeur.

Then, accompanied by the man of the house, young Benson hurried back to the scene of the wreck. The submarine captain found that he had at least been so bruised and shaken up that speed on his feet hurt.

The first to arrive, of those summoned, was the owner of the garage in Colfax. He came in a large car, burning gasoline fast.

"I'm Graves, from the garage," he introduced himself, shutting off power and leaping out. "Jove, what a smash this is!"

Until two doctors and several men arrived Graves devoted himself to helping make the injured victims as comfortable as possible.

When the doctors and helpers appeared on the scene Graves soon called Jack Benson aside.

"There's something about this affair that must be investigated," declared the garage man, in an undertone. "The cars that I keep are all of one make, and there are no stauncher, safer cars made in the world. No such accident has ever before happened to one of my cars. Come; let's see what we can find out."

Graves didn't have to look far. He halted at

the broken axle, staring at it hard. Then he looked over the broken casting from all sides.

"See here," Graves ground out, between his teeth, "all the axles on my cars are branded with the trade-mark of the maker, and the number of the inspector who passes the axles. Yet this axle is unbranded! Now, I happen to know that the left forward axle on this car—last night—was branded as usual, for I had the wheel off and looked it over. That I can swear to."

"Then another axle has been substituted?" demanded Jack, his eyes flashing.

"Yes, sirree."

"How long, after you saw the right axle in place here, was it before the car was taken from your garage?"

"According to the office books this car was taken from the garage at three o'clock this morning," replied Graves.

"By one of your own men?"

"No, sir! By a stranger who rented the car for a week, paid the rental price, and gave his name as Hodges. He seemed to understand all about running a car. He brought it back at six this morning."

"Was that time enough in which to substitute a defective axle?" Jack asked.

"Oh, yes; a man expert at such work could do it in considerably less time."

"Such a defective axle might run along smoothly, quite a while at low speed?" Benson persisted.

"Yes."

"But at high speed——?"

"Look at this axle!" continued the garage man, excitedly. "You know something about steel, don't you, young man?"

"Enough to run machinery."

"You see what a flawed piece of steel this is—unsuited to any strain? I don't believe this axle could stand the strain of high speed in a big auto for the distance of a mile."

"That's about all it stood with us," muttered Jack Benson, his face white, his jaws firmly set.

"There's been some nasty work here," continued the garage man. "It wasn't done by my chauffeur, either. He's probably the worst hurt of any in your party, which assures his innocence of a hand in the despicable work."

"Oh, I don't suspect your man—not for an instant," Jack assured the garage owner. "The truth is, I think I can guess just where to place the blame."

"Hodges turned this car over to you for a

pleasure jaunt, didn't he?" demanded the garage owner.

"Yes."

"And it was the same fellow who took this car out before daylight. It wasn't used again until it was sent around for your party. Mr. Benson, I think we can both guess whom to suspect in this desperately wicked piece of business. If I can find that rascal, Hodges, I'll certainly lay violent hands on him!"

"Don't!" advised Jack, quietly. "In the first place, Mr. Graves, if you took the law into your own hands, you'd only get yourself into trouble. In the second place"—Jack Benson lowered his voice still more—"I know, as well as I know I'm living, that Hodges was only the agent of some one else. Mr. Graves, do me a great favor—a great favor to all our party. For the present, if you must say anything, say just as little as possible about the accident. Let it go at that. Don't throw out any suspicions against Hodges. Don't let anyone know that I have any suspicions. Just keep the whole thing quiet—and in that way we'll get the authors of this outrage."

"Are you sure?" demanded Graves, his look still darkly vengeful.

"You might talk to just one person—when there's no one else around to overhear you,"

Jack agreed. "That man is the chief of police in Colfax. In view of some other things that he knows the chief will agree with my view, and will thank you for keeping quiet and looking puzzled over this affair."

"All right," grumbled Mr. Graves. "I'll do as you ask, Mr. Benson—until I've talked with the chief of police, anyway."

By this time the badly-injured members of the party had received first attention from the doctors, and were now being lifted into a big farm wagon that had been brought to the scene. In this vehicle they were taken to the nearest house, where they were placed on beds for better attention.

"I'm going back to the city, now," announced the garage man to the young submarine captain. "I'm going to the chief of police, and I'll also see to it that a big auto ambulance is sent out to take your friends and my man to the hospital in town. Hang it, I hate to keep the truth in this matter quiet, even for a moment, and I wouldn't do it, only to see justice worked out. You see, Mr. Benson, such a fearful accident, from one of my cars, will hurt my business until the whole truth is known. But I'll stick to my word, and keep quiet."

In three quarters of an hour's time the ambu-

lance had arrived, and also a car that Graves had sent to bring back Farnum and the three submarine boys.

"Don't run back at anything like speed, please," begged Mr. Farnum, with a wan smile. It had cut the shipbuilder to the marrow to find his friend, Pollard, so badly hurt.

"Nothing faster than ten miles an hour," promised the chauffeur.

Once in the city the auto followed the ambulance to the hospital, where Farnum went to see that every possible attention was given his friend. But Mr. Graves had already made splendid arrangements for the care of both injured men.

Then down to the Somerset went the able-bodied survivors of the submarine party. Though they said nothing in the hearing of the strange chauffeur, they were no more than inside Jacob's Farnum's room when they let loose their indignation.

It was not many minutes, however, ere the chief of police arrived.

"I've been talking with Graves, gentlemen," announced the chief, "and I'm wholy satisfied that the rascal, Hodges, is the first one we want to find. When we get him we'll try to make him tell who's behind him."

"Did you get anything out of the four fel-

lows you caught night before last?" asked Jack Benson.

"Not a word to amount to anything, so far," replied the chief. "But their case was continued a week by the court, and I'll find a way to make 'em talk! Just now, my whole thought is centered on finding Hodges."

"He isn't stopping at this hotel?" asked Jack.

"Not much! He wouldn't wait for us to come and gather him in like that," answered the chief. "No; I'm dragging the town, and I also have a man at the railway station, and another watching the water front."

"I can't understand how the fellow who called himself Hodges ever got Judson to write him a letter of introduction to me," muttered Mr. Farnum.

"Do you know Judson's writing?" asked the police chief, suspiciously.

"No-o-o," admitted Mr. Farnum. "But the letter was written on the letter-head of Judson's hotel."

"Anyone can get a hotel letter-head," retorted the police official, sagely. "You'd better let me have that letter, and I'll write Judson to wire me whether he ever signed it."

Farnum passed over the letter, though he muttered, disgustedly:

"Good heavens, have I reached my present age, only to be taken in with a faked letter of introduction?"

"If you have," responded the chief of police, grimly, "you won't be the only traveled, wide-awake business man who has been caught by a trick like that. In this country, where letters of introduction are passed around as freely as cigars, it's very seldom that a man stops to wonder whether the letter handed him is genuine."

An hour later the chief was back, to report that a man answering Hodges' description had taken a train north bound, not buying a ticket.

"I've telegraphed to have the fellow arrested at a point along the route," continued the police official. "I don't expect to get Hodges as easily as that, though. He undoubtedly will have left the train before it gets to where I have some one waiting to receive him."

"But the young woman he called his daughter?" asked Jack.

"She wasn't with him. The fellow traveled alone. Of course, the handsome daughter was only borrowed for the occasion."

From the hospital came the word that unfortunate David Pollard was resting comfortably.

"The scheme was one that was intended to put our whole party out of business," declared

Jack Benson, his eyes shining savagely. "I won't go so far as to say the Rhinds crowd wanted us killed, but they hoped we'd all be too badly hurt to go on with the submarine tests. Oh, what a rascally way to succeed in business!"

CHAPTER XIV

RADWIN DOESN'T SEE HIS BEST CHANCE

LATE in the afternoon Farnum went up to the hospital to see David Pollard again. As too many visitors would not be wise, the shipbuilder represented, also, his young submarine officers. He left them in the lobby of the Somerset.

"Don't go away from here," smiled Mr. Farnum, wearily. "Don't let anybody coax you away from here. Just stay right here, and I won't have to worry about you while I'm away. We can't take any chances—can't lose any more of our crowd."

"Those are orders, sir," Jack Benson answered. "You'll be obeyed."

For the better part of an hour the boys remained where Farnum had left them.

Then something happened that brought the flush of anger to all their bronzed, honest young faces.

Stop Right Where You Are!

One of the outer doors opened, and Fred Radwin, catching sight of the submarine boys as he entered, hastened over to where they sat, a look of pretended sympathy on his handsome but snake-like face.

"Boys," he called, in a low voice, as all three rose as though to ward off blows, "it was only a little while ago that I heard of the fearful accident. Poor Pollard! I want to tell you how heartily sorry I am to hear——"

"Stop right where you are, sir!"

Jack Benson's voice thundered out. The young submarine captain did not realize that he was using even more than a quarter-deck tone.

Everyone in the lobby turned to look on. A few, more curious than the others, hastened to where the little group stood.

"What—what do you mean?" stammered Fred Radwin, looking mightily bewildered.

"In the future, sir," and Jack's voice barely fell, "do us the honor not to speak to us."

"What on earth——" protested Radwin.

"If you don't heed my request," Jack continued, angrily, "I don't believe I shall be able to curb my desire to land both fists in your face."

Radwin drew back before the darkening, menacing glare in the eyes of the young submarine captain.

Hal, however, turned white—though from a cause that few would have guessed.

"Hold on, Benson! One moment——" protested Fred Radwin.

"Oh, get out of my sight, this instant," quivered Jack, taking another step toward his enemy.

Before all the curious throng Fred Radwin, strangely enough, felt too abashed, for the moment, to persist in his expressions of surprise.

"I'll talk with you later," he muttered, with a sickly smile, then turned away.

"If you do," Jack called after him, "I'll——"

Benson's voice died down as the young captain felt Hal Hastings's strong, impassioned grip on his arm.

Radwin, fortunately, did not turn, but kept on until he had taken himself out of sight.

Jack turned an inquiring glance on his chum's face. But Hal's warning look seemed to say:

"Silence! Wait!"

"What was the row about?" asked a stranger among those who had pressed about the boys.

"Nothing," returned Eph Somers, shortly, glaring at his questioner.

At a mute signal from Hal all three of the submarine boys seated themselves once more.

By degrees the little crowd melted away.

Then Jack Benson turned to his chum, to ask, in a low voice:

"What did you mean, Hal, old fellow? I know you had some good reason for checking me as you did."

"I was afraid you would hit Radwin," Hal murmured.

"A case of nothing struck, if I had!" uttered Captain Jack, bitterly.

"Oh, yes! You would have struck at our chances of winning out in these submarine tests," murmured Hal Hastings.

"What do you mean?" demanded Jack, looking startled.

"If you had hit Radwin, in the presence of all those witnesses, you would have been right in line to be arrested for assault."

"Pooh!" jeered Captain Jack. "A small fine, which I could easily pay."

"But the inconvenience of being locked up, at such a time?" asked Hal Hastings.

"Mr. Farnum would bail me out, quickly enough."

"I don't believe you see all of the point yet," murmured Hal, earnestly. "Suppose Radwin swore out a warrant against you for striking him. Then suppose he paid a court officer to wait and serve the warrant just as the boats were starting out on some new test cruise?

Then you'd go ashore, and we'd either have to go on without our captain, or else draw out of the test. Fine business, that, when our first and only business is to make the Pollard boats the number-one winners in as many tests as possible!"

"Great Cæsar!" exploded Jack, realizing, now, what a narrow escape he had had from another disaster to their common interests.

"So you be on your guard," Hal went on with his wise counsel. "No one—at least, no one in your own crowd—doubts your grit, or your willingness to clinch with Radwin and fight it out to a copper-riveted finish. I don't blame you for wanting to thrash Radwin every time you think of poor Dave Pollard up at the hospital. I want to do it myself. Radwin didn't think fast enough, or he'd have sneered at you, and provoked you into hitting him. That was why I grabbed your right arm—to stop you. It'll come to Radwin before long, what a fine chance he missed. Then he'll put himself in your way—when there are witnesses around."

"Thank you, Hal," nodded Jack Benson, his voice unusually quiet. "You've given me a good, big hint. I won't forget it. Until the tests are all over Radwin may parade before me, and mock at me, if he wants. But afterward——!"

CHAPTER XV

THE GOAL OF THE LIGHTNING CRUISE

ON three different days, thereafter, there were various tests in which the submarine craft entered, each striving for points and leadership.

On one of these days the event was firing with "dummy" torpedoes. This work was carried on out in the bay. Then there were two other days of firing with actual, loaded torpedoes, the work, one day, being with stationery naval targets. On the other day the work with loaded torpedoes was directed against moving targets—perpendicular floats towed by a tug with a very long hawser.

While some of the firing was done by the crews of the respective submarines, a good deal more was performed by members of the naval board, in order that the boats, rather than the crews, might be tested.

In each of these events the Pollard boats were the winners. At the moving targets the Day submarine took second place away from the Rhinds boats; in the other events the Rhinds craft came in second, though rather close to the records achieved by the Pollard submarines.

Farnum was elated, of course. So were his young officers. Lieutenant Danvers, who was on board at each test, was also much pleased, though he did not express it. The cheering news was taken to David Pollard, in hospital, and greatly lightened his days of suffering and waiting.

And now, for two days, the grim-looking little submarine fleet had lain at moorings. Not one was there among their crews but wondered whether any further competitive tests were to be ordered.

There had been no more meetings, on shore, between the Rhinds party and our friends. Radwin had hoped for such a meeting, for, as Hal had predicted, the dark-faced rascal had soon reasoned out that it would be an excellent thing to stop a few blows delivered by Captain Jack Benson.

But Farnum had kept his party on the "Benson" and the "Hastings."

"Fred, I wonder whether we are going to have any more tests," demanded Mr. Rhinds, as he and his secretary lingered over their breakfast at the Somerset.

"I wish I knew," sighed Radwin.

"We've been beaten, a few points, by that Pollard crowd," muttered Rhinds, his face lowering. "But we're not altogether walloped,

Fred. The government is going to buy a good many submarine boats. Now, it isn't necessary for the government to have the boats all of one type, is it?"

"Of course not," Radwin assented.

"Just so," continued the older man, "now, we've made a pretty good showing, after all. So I have already begun with some telegrams to the Senators and Congressmen of our state—oh, you mustn't feel that you always have advance information on all I'm doing, young man," chuckled Rhinds, noting the look of surprise in his companion's face. "I've started with our state's members in Congress, and soon I shall begin to go at 'em harder. Now, despite the fact that the Pollard boats have been able to gain a few points over us, I believe I can engineer matters so that the government will order two types of submarine, instead of one. In fact, Fred, when the government gives out its big orders for submarine boats, I hope to land forty per cent., at least, of the business."

Fred Radwin glanced cautiously around him, to make sure that no waiters stood within hearing distance. Then he hissed, sharply:

"Forty per cent. of the business, you say? I still intend to land one hundred per cent. of the submarine business for our company?"

"How?" asked the older man, eagerly.

"I'll think it over a while, before I tell you my definite plans."

"Be careful, Fred," warned Rhinds, "not to make any moves that will be our undoing!"

"Have I gotten you into any trouble yet, Mr. Rhinds?"

"No," admitted the older man, though he added, half-jeeringly:

"Nor have you beaten the Pollard crowd at any point along the road, that I can remember."

"Wait!" retorted Radwin, mysteriously.

These two villains were just sipping from their last cups of coffee when, even in the dining room, there reached their ears the muffled sound of gunfire from the bay.

"What's that?" demanded Radwin. "I want to hear the rest of that!"

He hurried through the dining room to the front of the lobby.

"There it goes," he cried, as Rhinds, puffing somewhat, joined him. "First, the gunfire, then seven long whistles, followed by—wait!"

As the whistling ceased another gun boomed forth.

"That's the emergency signal, to call all hands back who belong on submarines," uttered Radwin, wheeling about. "We must get our hats and coats, and hustle down to the water front."

Radwin, had in truth, read the signal aright. It was the signal that the naval board had announced in case, at any time, there should be sudden, official news for the officers and crews of the rival submarines.

"What can it be, I wonder?" pondered John Rhinds, as they hurried through a street that led to the pier.

"Probably some test in which the board wants us to start without any preparation," replied Radwin.

"I wish I knew what it was," muttered Rhinds.

"That's just the way every man-jack aboard the submarine boats is feeling about it," jeered Radwin. "Jove, I hope the test, to-day, is one in which we stand a chance to beat the Pollard crowd!"

Jacob Farnum had just started from the "Hastings," in a shore boat, when the first gun boomed forth. The shipbuilder had been on his way to see his friend, at the hospital, when he heard the first gun. Stopping the rowers, he quickly comprehended when the whistle blasts started. He accordingly directed that he be put back alongside the "Hastings."

Jack, Hal and Eph had come tumbling up on deck at the first realization of the signal. Grant Andrews and his men were no longer on board,

having gone, at daylight, to their boarding-house on shore.

"What do you suppose is in the air, Jack?" called Mr. Farnum.

"I don't know, sir. But whatever it is, we're ready. We can start, on anything, at the drop of a handkerchief. Gasoline tanks full, compressed air by the cubic yard, storage batteries charged."

"It would be hard to catch you youngsters unprepared," laughed the shipbuilder, appreciatively.

They were still on deck, waiting and wondering, when they saw the president and secretary of the Rhinds company put off from shore in haste.

"They don't mean to be left," sneered Eph.

"They're pretty badly left already," muttered Captain Jack, bitterly. "They haven't beaten us, so far, by a single point."

"I suppose they're hoping they will to-day, whatever the test is to be," muttered Hal Hastings.

Fifteen minutes more passed. Then a little flock of six-oared cutters left the side of the gunboat "Oakland." In the stern-sheets of each cutter sat a naval officer in uniform.

"There's Lieutenant Danvers," cried Jack,

eagerly. "He brings us our instructions, whatever they are."

In a few moments more Danvers was alongside, making his way up to the platform deck. In his right hand Danvers carried an official-looking sealed envelope.

In his eager curiosity Jacob Farnum extended a hand to take the envelope, but Danvers drew it back.

"Pardon me," murmured the shipbuilder, confusedly. "I should have known better. The communication is, of course, for the captain."

Danvers turned the envelope over to Captain Jack Benson, who broke the seal, drawing out the paper enclosed. This is a part of what the submarine boy read aloud:

" 'The Navy Department has just reported, by wireless, that a semi-submerged derelict, evidently that of a three-master schooner, is drifting in the paths of navigation at a point 385 miles southwest by south of this present station. The Department suggests that it would afford an example of practical use for submarines, if those now on this station would accompany a gunboat, at full speed for cruising, and attempt to discover and blow up this derelict.' "

"Great!" glowed Eph. "I vote for it."

"So do those on the other boats, if the ob-

servable excitement is to be taken as an indication," laughed Mr. Farnum.

"This letter goes on to request," announced Benson, "that the commander of each submarine willing to enter this affair signal to the 'Oakland' by hoisting the signal 'ready.' Do you hear that, Eph?"

Somers made a dash for the signal chest. In another moment the appropriate bit of bunting was fluttering on the halliard at the top of the signal mast.

"We are directed," Jack read on, "to be ready within thirty minutes. We must follow the 'Oakland' down the bay at a cruising speed of sixteen miles an hour. Once out of the bay, the 'Oakland' will signal our formation to us."

"Do you see the boat the Rhinds signal is going up on?" laughed Hal Hastings. "It is going up on the submarine 'Thor.' According to the old Norsemen tales Thor was The Thunderer—also the fellow who struck with the big hammer. It looks like a Rhinds boast that they are to do big things on this lightning cruise."

"Yes; Thor was an old Norse god," muttered Captain Jack. "And the early Norsemen were very largely pirates. Perhaps we are to take the signal on the 'Thor' as an intimation that

Rhinds is out to play pirate in earnest on this cruise."

As Benson uttered these words he felt an odd little shiver run over him. Yet he gave it no more thought. Little idea had he, at that moment, how prophetic his words were likely to be!

In half an hour, as planned, the "Oakland," after firing a warning gun, steamed away from her moorings. Gradually the gunboat's speed increased, until the full sixteen miles were being made—miles, instead of knots, since gasoline boats, like these submarines, are usually rated by miles instead of by the longer "knot."

It was a rattling rate of speed to exact from these little craft, when it was considered that the gait would have to be continued, without break, for at least twenty-four hours.

Eph was at the wheel, at the start, and Jack standing back by the conning tower. Mr. Farnum had gone below for a nap, as he intended to relieve Hal in the engine room after a few hours.

"Benson," remarked Danvers, approaching the submarine boy, "I guess your remark of a few minutes ago exactly defines this trip."

"What remark?" asked Jack.

"You spoke of it as a lightning cruise. It is going to be one, indeed, for these little submarine craft."

"Our boat can stand it, I think," smiled the submarine skipper.

"And so can the Rhinds boat, probably. But some of the others will find themselves sorely put to to keep up the speed for twenty-four hours."

"And, if they don't?" queried Jack.

Danvers shrugged his shoulders.

"Then I guess they'll have to be satisfied with being left far behind, unless they signal that they're in actual distress."

"This speed," mused Captain Jack, "must be part of the government's plans for another test. The Navy Department must have planned to see whether any of these boats could stand such a gait for twenty-four long hours."

"I couldn't tell you if I knew," remarked Lieutenant Danvers, with a quizzical look, then turned and strolled away.

"And I guess," muttered the submarine boy to himself, "that that's about as near as a fellow can go to giving a tip, once he has had the Navy muzzle padlocked to his jaws."

Some of the submarines in this long race—for such it was—were better equipped as to the number of the crew. The Rhinds had this ad-

vantage, carrying a captain and four men, in addition to Rhinds himself and his secretary.

Yet Jack and Eph relieved each other regularly at the wheel, catching long naps between. Hal and Mr. Farnum did the same thing with the engine room, and the "Hastings" kept well in the van through the day, and also through the long night that followed.

Two hours after daylight the "Oakland" signaled to the submarines to run up close to this "parent vessel," the gunboat.

"Further orders, of course," muttered Jack, who was at the wheel at the time. "Well, we're not such a very long run, now, from the reported location of that derelict."

The fleet was wholly out of sight of land. The wind was fresh and the sea lively with short, choppy waves, crested by white-caps. Yet, for boats as staunch as these submarines, the sea was not a difficult one for boat handling.

One after another, while still going at full speed, the submarines drew close to the "Oakland." One after another, as signaled, the boats put in within easy hailing distance of the gunboat.

"The 'Hastings' will keep to the same southwest by south course, but at a distance of two miles off this vessel's port bow," came the

order. "The 'Thor' will take up similar position, two miles off the port side of the 'Hastings.'"

The three remaining torpedo boats were assigned to positions corresponding on the starboard side of the "Oakland."

In this order the boats went ahead at a speed reduced to fourteen miles. The front of the line extended over some ten miles; in reality the line of vision extended much further than that. Unless the semi-submerged derelict had moved much faster than such derelicts usually do, it was difficult to see how the wreck could get through this line of exploration.

Jack Benson pressed a signal that brought Hal Hastings up on deck.

"Rouse Eph and Mr. Farnum," ordered the young skipper. "We've got to have all hands on, now. And call Lieutenant Danvers, also. He's not allowed to help us, but he'll be anxious to see what is going on."

As soon as Eph Somers reached deck Jack Benson turned the wheel over to him. Then the young captain got his marine glasses, stationing himself, most of the time, beside the deck wheel.

"If it's in any way possible," muttered Jack, "I want to be the first to sight that derelict. I want the honor of sinking her to come to us.

It will all be points in the game we are fighting for."

As Benson spoke he swung his glass around to cover the deck of the "Thor," that craft being, now, her full two miles away off the port beam.

"Rhinds has his whole crowd on deck, too," growled young Benson, using his powerful marine glass with interest. "Yes; everyone on deck, except two men for the engine room."

At this moment Lieutenant Danvers stepped on deck, looking as though he had slept well. The naval officer carried a glass very much like the submarine skipper's.

"It's almost mean of me to bring a glass on deck with me," laughed Danvers. "Under the rules I'm forbidden to give you any information I may find for myself."

Jack nodded pleasantly, then turned to sweep the sea ahead. At a distance of a few miles it would be easy enough to miss the half-submerged derelict.

For some three hours the flotilla swept on, with active officers on every deck. The naval board had ordered this new formation ere reaching the probable location of the derelict.

"We haven't passed the thing, anyway," Jack muttered to Eph. "The sea isn't rough enough for that to be possible."

Part of the time young Benson had surrendered his glass to his first officer, while the captain himself stood by the wheel.

But now, Jack was again pacing the deck, while Eph, his eyes mostly on the compass, steered steadily by course.

Suddenly, Jack Benson started. Quickly he wiped the outer lenses of his glass, then looked again.

"See anything?" demanded Eph.

"Yes, sirree! And the 'Thor' is almost a mile nearer than we are! It's the derelict—not a doubt of it!"

Like a flash Jack sprang to the wheel, ringing the bell for full speed.

"Eph, hustle below! Tell Hal we've sighted the derelict. Tell him to hump the engines. Tell him I don't care how much we overheat the machinery so that we don't blow the craft up. Jump!"

Eph collided with Jacob Farnum, who had started up from below, but he brushed the shipbuilder aside, rushing below as though death pursued him.

CHAPTER XVI

JACK GIVES THE ORDER, "FIRE!"

THE naval officer, too, had made out a bobbing something on the sea, ahead, over at port, which he took to be the long-sought derelict.

The lieutenant could not say anything, but, with glass still at his eyes, he leaned back against the conning tower, drawing in his breath sharply.

"Want me to take the wheel?" called out Eph, as he reached deck again.

"Yes. I want to keep the glass to my eyes."

Just one look did Benson take at the supposed derelict. Then he swung his gaze around upon the "Thor."

"They've seen our speed-burst," cried the young submarine skipper. "I don't believe they had spotted the derelict, but now they see us shooting ahead, to cross their course, and that has told them the secret. Yes! There they go ahead, and pointing straight. They've caught up the old wreck—through our glasses!"

It was provoking, but the rival boat, besides being nearer at the start, had also started forward at greater speed.

"This is the 'Thor's' trick," thought Lieutenant Danvers to himself. "Too bad, too. I'd like to have seen the boys take it."

Jacob Farnum's private view, not expressed, agreed with the naval officer's.

But Jack Benson? He simply couldn't admit any victory for the rival—not until it was actually won.

"Swing a half-point off port bow, Eph—steady, now!" breathed the young skipper, intensely.

Down below, Hal Hastings was performing as near to wonders as was possible with a gasoline engine. Jacob Farnum stood just inside the conning tower, prepared to rush below with any other orders.

"Yes, it's the derelict!" shouted Benson, presently. "I can make out the stumps of two masts now. We'll be there in a few minutes."

"We'll be lucky if we don't get there too late," grumbled Somers. "Shall I steer direct for the old wreck, or take the course from you?"

"Better take it from me for a time," Benson replied. "My glass will be more dependable than your naked eye."

The "Thor," also, was heading straight for the derelict. So far, the Rhinds boat was still nearer.

It began to look, however, as if the "Thor's"

engines were not quite as fast as those of the other Rhinds boat, the "Zelda."

"Are we going to make it?" breathed Eph, the perspiration of sheer strain standing out on his forehead.

"Yes!" almost barked Jack Benson.

"Sure thing, is it?" persisted Somers.

"Sure—only don't talk too much," growled young Benson.

It was the grit, the dogged determination of the born commander—the natural leader of men.

A moment later Jack turned a white face toward the shipbuilder.

"Mr. Farnum, tell Hal he'll have to pour the oil in faster. We've got to have more speed."

Farnum did not even wait for the second sentence. He dived below. All of a sudden the "Hastings" was seen to take a notable leap forward. Then she settled down to a more rapid, steady gait.

Just inside the conning tower Jacob Farnum stood again. In his right hand he clutched a doubled-up handkerchief, with which he made frequent dabs at his face.

The shipbuilder knew that the present speed, with its dangerous overheating of the engines, spelled blank disaster if continued for long.

Hal Hastings, down below, standing like a

white wraith beside his engines, realized the same thing.

So, too, did Jack Benson, the young skipper, for whom, in this mad moment, there was but one word in the language—"win!"

Eph didn't stop to realize it. He was worrying about straight steering, and he couldn't worry about more than one thing at a time.

Lieutenant Danvers must have known what was patent to every other mind, but he neither said nor did anything. He was a Navy officer, trained not to display emotion.

"Good!" came from Captain Jack's lips. Yet, in the intensity of his strain it was a groan, rather than a note of exultation. "We're cutting into the 'Thor's' water."

A few moments more, and Benson found his craft slantingly across the Rhinds boat's course, well ahead.

"Now, we'll show you!" quavered Jack Benson, as he briefly shook his fist back at the wicked rivals.

"If we don't blow the lid off this sea-turtle!" muttered young Somers, to himself.

At the youthful captain's sharp order Eph swung the course around.

"Now, drive straight toward the derelict, Eph!" breathed the young commander, his eyes glittering. "I leave the deck in your hands

for a minute. You're broadside on, now. Keep driving, steady, as you are!"

As Farnum saw young Benson dashing his way the shipbuilder understood and darted down the stairs.

After him plunged Jack Benson. Below, both became cooler, for the task in hand must not be bungled. On one of the trucks they dragged a torpedo forward, fitting it in the tube.

As he closed the after port behind the torpedo, Jack bent over to place Jacob Farnum's hand on the firing lever.

"Stand there, sir, till you've done it!" quavered Captain Jack.

"Will you signal the order?"

"No, sir! You'll get it by voice."

As Benson wheeled, dashing away, he had an instant's glimpse, sideways, of Hal Hastings's face. Great as Jack's haste was, that look at his chum's face haunted him.

There was no time for sentiment, now, though. It was literally do or die!

The "Thor" was now three hundred yards astern, making frantic efforts to lessen the distance, yet actually losing time.

Ahead, the derelict was now some fifteen hundred yards away. The half-sunken wreck still presented a broadside, as shown by the positions of two stumps of masts.

"What range are you going to fire at?" asked Eph Somers.

"The torpedo is set for six hundred yards; we'll fire at three hundred."

Captain Jack's voice was cooler, steadier, now. The first great strain had subsided. He was cool, tense, now—though not a whit less determined to win at all hazards.

As there was still some time to spare, and Eph could handle the "Hastings" as well as any other helmsman on earth, Jack stepped back to the conning tower.

Lieutenant Danvers was there, though with his gaze astern.

"I can just picture old Rhinds," laughed Captain Jack, a bit harshly. "He's saying hard things about us, for cutting in on his course and getting the derelict away from him."

Danvers laughed.

"The old fellow is swearing a blue streak, and threatening himself with an apoplectic stroke every instant."

"You don't seem to love Mr. Rhinds very noticeably," grimaced the naval officer.

"If I don't," voiced Jack, "neither do any of our crowd. And the reason is more than mere business rivalry, too."

Lieutenant Danvers knew nothing whatever

of the dastardly attempts against the Pollard crowd that Rhinds and Radwin had engineered.

It was not a time, however, in which to waste precious moments looking back at the more tardy rival boat.

Jack wheeled, bracing himself against the conning tower. They were now within eight hundred yards of the derelict's broadside-on.

How the "Hastings" seemed to crawl over the last of the intervening water space! Yet Hal realized, if Jack did not, how swiftly the submarine was racing.

"Five hundred yards!" clicked Jack, and stepped inside the conning tower, snatching up a megaphone.

Four hundred and fifty—four hundred—three-fifty—three-twenty-five! "Fire!"

That last word was bellowed below through the megaphone. Jack, his eyes staring forward, saw something leap near the bow, and saw an upward dash of spray. The torpedo had left the tube.

"Hard-aport, Eph! Swing her right over. So!"

From his own post in the conning tower Benson signaled for slow speed, now. It would never do to stop the overheated engines utterly. Besides, seaway was needed, with the rival craft coming up behind.

His work in the conning tower done, Captain Jack sprang out on the platform deck, bounding beside Lieutenant Danvers at the starboard rail. Through the manhole opening of the tower the shipbuilder soon thrust his uncovered head.

Was the torpedo, so carefully aimed, going to strike and do its work?

CHAPTER XVII

THE MESSAGE OF TERROR

"IS it a hit, do you think?" gasped Jack.

"I think——" began the naval officer.

Boom! It came suddenly, sullenly. A column of spray shot up between the two mast-stumps of the derelict. The rising water reached a height of eighty or ninety feet, then came down again like a heavy rain.

But the wreck itself?

One of the mast-stumps tottered, then the other. In an instant more nothing of the derelict was to be seen, saving some floating wreckage made up of less water-logged wood.

"A fair hit, I'll wager my commission!" cried Danvers, eagerly.

"Yes," nodded Jacob Farnum. "That's the

last of the derelict. She's removed from the paths of navigation."

There could be no doubt of the completeness of the work done by the torpedo from the "Hastings." A broad grin now appeared on the shipbuilder's lately white face.

"Mr. Farnum, will you tell Hal, whenever he thinks best, to slow down to mere headway?"

"Aye, aye, Captain," sang the shipbuilder, jovially, and disappeared from view.

"Benson, I congratulate you on your nerve," spoke Lieutenant Danvers, as he turned, his eyes glowing, to the youthful submarine commander.

"I don't know as I deserve that good word," muttered Jack, slowly, shaking his head. "It was win or die with us."

"I realize that."

"And I took a big chance of blowing our engines out."

"I thought so, at the time."

"Then, Lieutenant, you must realize that I risked your life, as well as ours."

"I knew it," nodded Danvers, coolly.

Then he rested a hand half affectionately on young Benson's nearer shoulder.

"My boy, what is risking a life or two, when there's such a prize to win—such a naval lesson to be learned and taught? American naval history is full of the names of officers and men who

have thrown away their lives in learning something new for the benefit of the service."

"I like that way of putting it," replied Captain Jack, though he spoke soberly. "I had a notion I was pretty wicked when I took such chances."

"It would have been criminal, if it hadn't been your purpose to show what a craft of this type can do when pushed in emergencies. But I have learned much to-day that will stand me in great stead, should I ever be in command of a flotilla of submarines in war time."

"Then I suppose I ought to forgive myself for my recklessness," laughed Jack.

"You want to forget it, Benson. The thing you want to remember is that men who serve in navies sign their lives away when they enter the service. All must be sacrificed, at the first instant of need, to the service and to the Flag!"

"That idea would frighten some mothers, wouldn't it?" smiled Captain Jack Benson.

"Fighting battles is not a woman's business," replied Danvers, soberly and reverently. "Her task is to rear sons who shall be unafraid, and to leave the rest to the God of Battles."

The "Hastings" now drifted so lazily over the waters that Eph stood by the wheel, one hand resting indolently against the uppermost spokes.

The "Thor" had headed off, after watching the explosion of the torpedo, and was now considerably off the "Hastings's" port beam. The "Oakland," on the other hand, was heading up for an official view of what wasn't there in the shape of a derelict.

As she came in close the gunboat sounded three long, hoarse whistles.

"There are your congratulations from the board, Benson," laughed the naval lieutenant, then walked over to port. Jacob Farnum slipped out on the platform deck to hear any hail that might come from Uncle Sam's gunboat.

Danvers was no longer interested in the scene. Whatever was to come, he felt, would be tame compared with what he had recently seen.

So he stood, looking out dreamily over the waters at port. He saw the "Thor" head for the "Hastings," as though intending to come up. Then she veered off, heading eastward.

At this instant the naval officer happened to have his glass to his eyes. He had just counted the number of people in sight on the Rhinds craft.

"All but one of the Rhinds crowd on deck," thought Mr. Danvers. "I don't make out that fellow, Radwin. He must be taking the engine trick."

Jack Benson also sauntered over to port side, though not with any intention of addressing the naval officer. Benson was not thinking of anything in particular as he glanced out over the waves.

Then, all of a sudden, the young submarine commander sprang alert with suspicion—next, certainty and horror!

Out there on the water something was moving—something headed toward the "Hastings." It came on with a swift, cleaving movement. There was a suspicion of a fin throwing up a little spray in the path of motion.

It was horrible—unbelievable!

The mere suspicion galvanized him into action.

Captain Jack's feet barely seemed to touch the deck as he leaped forward.

Eph was at the wheel, but there was no time to shout a frenzied order that might be misunderstood.

Besides, in the instant that he was in the air, young Benson had no sharply defined plan of what he was going to do.

But that fin over to port was the half-visible upper part of a moving torpedo! It was headed so as to intercept the "Hastings" on her slow, forward course.

If he rang for speed ahead, Captain Jack

knew it might not come swiftly enough to carry his boat and its human load ahead to safety.

In any case, it must be a job of seconds. If Hal responded slowly to the signal—then destruction!

All this seemed to flash like lightning through the young commander's head as he made that leap for the wheel.

Somers being in the way, young Benson flung him violently aside.

Captain Jack's left hand grasped a spoke of the steering wheel; his right hand signaled violently for speed astern.

Would Hal respond in time to save them all?

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FINDINGS ON THE "THOR"

IT was a breathless moment.

Captain Jack Benson, resting one hand on the wheel, gazed off at port side with fascinated stare.

Almost instantly a grating could be heard that must have come from the propeller shafts, though the young skipper, at that moment, was incapable of thinking of anything save that tiny fin-line out on the water.

Then the speed ahead of the submarine boat

stopped. In another moment the little steel craft was creeping backward.

On came that fin-line.

There was nothing more that Jack could do, save to hold the wheel rigid.

On for the bow of the "Hastings" came the fin-line. Would that moving torpedo strike, hurling them all to destruction?

It must have been by a hair's breath, but that fin-line crossed the bow of the submarine. It had gone on, beyond—harmlessly, now!

"What's that you're saying, Eph?" demanded Jack. "Oh, yes; you want to know why I bowled you over in that fashion. Because there wasn't time to speak. I was crazy to get the reverse gear at work, and take us out of the path of that torpedo aimed for us."

"Torpedo?" demanded Eph Somers, thunderstruck.

"Torpedo?" repeated Jacob Farnum, in bewilderment.

"Yes," broke in Lieutenant Danvers, stepping forward. "See, its force is expended, and now it's floating on the water over there off the starboard bow."

Jacob Farnum stared at it as though utterly unable to comprehend anything.

"I saw the thing coming our way," went on the naval officer, hastily, "though not as soon as

Benson did. By the time that I knew it, he was acting. So I held my peace, for, if Benson had failed—well, nothing would have mattered much—then!"

In a few more crisp, swift sentences, Danvers told the rest of it adding:

"It was Benson's quick coolness that saved us all from going skyward."

"No, it wasn't," broke in the youthful skipper, decisively. "It was Hal, who was right by his engines, who saved us. Had he acted on the signal a second and a half later that torpedo would have struck us plumb and fair."

"But who could have let a torpedo loose in that fashion?" stammered Farnum. "What accident——"

"Accident!" broke in Jack, sneeringly.

"Accident!" repeated Danvers, scornfully.

"Well, then, how——"

"Mr. Farnum," broke in Jack Benson, sternly, "that torpedo was fired by design, with intent to sink us!"

"What? Who——"

"I can't make any positive charge," it was Lieutenant Danvers's turn to say. "But I can offer certain evidence that I'll stick to anywhere. Just a few seconds before that torpedo got so close to us I was noting the Rhinds boat, the

'Thor.' Her course was toward us, briefly. Then she turned off on another course."

"Do you mean to say that the Rhinds boat was turned our way at just the time when that torpedo could have left her, headed for us?" demanded Jacob Farnum.

"That's the whole indication," replied Lieutenant Danvers, firmly.

"Then what are we doing, waiting here?" cried the shipbuilder, angrily. "Jack, now that that torpedo is spent, and lying harmless on the water, start up speed and head over that way. Go carefully, for, remember, any sudden shock against the war-head of the torpedo would set it off."

Jack signaled for slow speed ahead, the response coming promptly.

"Somers," directed Lieutenant Danvers, "get the signal bunting out, and I'll help you rig a signal to the 'Oakland.' "

It was the first time, on any of the cruises, that Danvers had attempted to give an order, or to take any part in the handling of the craft. But now he was about to make a serious report, as an officer of the United States Navy.

In a very few moments, Danvers and Somers working together, the necessary flags were out, and knotted to the line in their proper order.

"Hoist away!" ordered the lieutenant, himself giving a hand on the halliard.

Up the signal mast went the line of bunting, fluttering. The little flags spelled out this message to the gunboat:

"Evidence of serious foul play. Join us to investigate."

Almost immediately there came a signal from the bridge of the gunboat, to show that the message had been read.

Jack was now slowing down speed, making ready to lie to, a hundred yards or less from the floating torpedo.

"Mr. Farnum, Hal's always at his post," said Jack, "but call down to him to be sure to stick particularly close for the next few minutes. If the wind shifts, and heads that torpedo our way, I want to be sure of instant speed for getting out of the way."

The gunboat was now cruising leisurely over to where the "Hastings" waited. Danvers signed to the officer on the "Oakland's" bridge to keep an especial eye on the floating torpedo.

As the "Oakland" slowed up, a cutter, in charge of an ensign, put away from the gunboat's side.

"Ensign," shouted Lieutenant Danvers, "we shall feel obliged if you can lie alongside of that torpedo, and render the war-head harmless.

We believe the torpedo to be fully loaded, and ready for instant action."

"I'll do what I can, sir, and as promptly as possible," replied the ensign, saluting his superior officer.

A few minutes later the working part of the torpedo's war-head had been removed by the boat's crew, and the torpedo itself was taken in tow.

"Now, Ensign, run in alongside, and take me on board," announced Lieutenant Danvers. "Mr. Benson, you'll go over to the 'Oakland' with me, of course?"

By this time the "Thor" had come about, and up within hailing distance of her Pollard rival.

"What's wrong? What has happened?" demanded John C. Rhinds, in a hoarse, croaking voice.

None aboard the "Hastings" took the trouble even to look in the direction of the speaker.

"Can't you hear, aboard the 'Hastings'?" insisted Rhinds.

But he had no better result than from his first hail.

In the meantime, Danvers and Jack, on reaching the gunboat, went at once before a council composed of the naval board and the commander of the gunboat.

The two witnesses told their story speedily and clearly.

"Can you swear that the torpedo was fired from the 'Thor,' Lieutenant?" inquired Captain Magowan, president of the naval board.

"I cannot, sir, but all the evidence points to the truth of my suspicion. For one thing, while some of the submarines were in line with us, yet all were too far away to drive a torpedo that far. Besides, as I have stated, the 'Thor' turned briefly toward us, at just the time when the torpedo would have been fired from her, then swung around promptly."

All of the naval officers present showed, in their faces, the horror they felt over the situation.

"It does not seem to me," declared Captain Magowan, glancing around at his associates, "that there can be any doubt as to our course. The evidence, though wholly circumstantial, is about as strong as it could be."

"Besides which, sir," advanced Mr. Danvers, "the 'Thor' was provided with a stated number of torpedoes."

"Four," nodded Captain Magowan; "just as was the case with each of the other submarine boats."

"Then, if you search the 'Thor,' and find but three torpedoes aboard, now——"

"That will be all the evidence needed," admitted Captain Magowan. "We will make the search, and, on finding but three torpedoes aboard the 'Thor,' we will place everyone on board under arrest, and send the 'Thor' into port under charge of one of our own naval crews. Gentlemen, there is no need of further delay. Commander Ellis, I will ask of you a cutter, a crew, a corporal and a file of marines."

"The boat and men shall be ready at once, sir," replied the gunboat's commander, hastening from the room.

Grimly the three officers comprising the board rose and hooked their swords to their belts. for they were going on an official visit.

Nor was any time lost. Jack Benson and Lieutenant Danvers were ordered to accompany the members of the board.

So John Rhinds's question was destined to have a prompt answer, even if of a kind different from what he had expected.

On the platform deck of the "Thor," as the cutter approached, stood several men whose faces expressed the utmost astonishment.

And again Rhinds inquired, this time with a little tremor in his voice:

"What's wrong gentlemen? What has happened?"

"We're coming aboard," retorted Captain

Magowan. "Have your men stand by to catch our lines."

John Rhinds submitted, in silence, while the members of the board, the corporal's file of marines and Lieutenant Danvers boarded the "Thor." But when Jack started to bring up the rear Rhinds's voice rose in angry protest.

"That young Benson fellow can't come aboard here!" cried the old man, his cheeks purple, his eyes aflame with anger. "Benson represents a rival submarine company!"

"If he represents a dozen companies, he's coming aboard this time," retorted Captain Magowan, coldly. "Corporal, see to it that no interference with Mr. Benson is attempted."

"Yes, sir," replied the corporal, saluting.

So Jack came aboard, and took his place quietly beside Lieutenant Danvers.

"Mr. Rhinds," began Captain Magowan, solemnly, "a torpedo only just barely missed striking the 'Hastings' a while ago. We have evidence that your craft was pointing nose-on to the 'Hastings,' just before the torpedo appeared by the Pollard craft."

"Do you mean, sir, that we are charged with —or suspected of—firing a torpedo at a rival submarine boat?" demanded John Rhinds, heavily, in a voice vibrating with astonishment.

"Some of the evidence seems to point that way," returned Captain Magowan, dryly.

"Why, sir," began Rhinds, indignantly, "it's preposterous. It's——"

But Captain Magowan cut him short by a wave of the hand.

"What we want, now, Mr. Rhinds, is to go below and examine your stock of loaded torpedoes. You should have four on board. If you prove to have only three——"

"Step this way, gentlemen. Follow me," begged Mr. Rhinds, making a rather ceremonious bow. Then he led the way below. Danvers and Jack followed the others.

And here all hands encountered a tremendous surprise. The "Thor" still carried her full supply of four loaded torpedoes!

Over the intense astonishment that followed this discovery came the oily tones of John C. Rhinds:

"Now, gentlemen, I won't speak of an apology, for I know you must have strong seeming reasons before you went so far as to suspect anyone aboard the 'Thor' of an atrocious crime. But, in the face of the evidence you have here, you will admit that it is impossible to attach any guilt to anyone aboard this craft."

"Well, Mr. Benson," broke in Captain Magowan, dumfounded.

"So it would seem," murmured the captain's two puzzled associates on the board.

"What the deuce can it mean?" was what Lieutenant Danvers said, but he was discreet enough to say it under his breath.

"Come, young Benson," challenged John Rhinds, "even you must admit that the 'Thor' shows a clean bill of moral health!"

"I'll admit that two and two make five, and that the moon is made of sage cheese," retorted Captain Jack. "I'll admit that the north pole is steam-heated. But——"

"Well, Mr. Benson," broke in Captain Magowan, crisply. "Why do you hesitate?"

"I believe, Captain," Jack went on, "that there are several questions that can yet be asked."

"Ask them, then, Mr. Benson," directed the president of the naval board.

"Yes, sir. Yet I would prefer that the questions be asked on deck, in the presence of the entire crew, and also of the naval officer who had been stationed on this craft during the cruise."

Ensign Pike was the officer of the Navy who had been on board the "Thor." Pike had remained up on the platform deck during this scene.

"Very good," nodded Captain Magowan.

"We will return to the deck. I can see that there are many questions to be asked."

On the deck, on first boarding, Jack Benson had noticed the absence of Fred Radwin. While they were below Jack had caught a glimpse of Radwin in the "Thor's" engine room.

When the naval board and the others reached the deck Captain Magowan had Captain Driggs, of the "Thor," and the members of the boat's crew lined up together.

"Have you any questions that you wish to ask, Mr. Benson?" the president of the board inquired.

"Yes, sir. At the time that the torpedo passed our boat I would like to know just who of the 'Thor's' complement were below."

"Can you answer that, Mr. Driggs?" demanded Captain Magowan.

Driggs was a bronzed, shrewd-looking man of forty, with a face that looked rather sound and wholesome.

"Yes, sir," replied Driggs, promptly. "Mr. Radwin had volunteered to relieve the man on duty in the engine room. Mr. Radwin was below at the time, sir."

"And who else?"

"No one else at that time, sir."

"I think I can confirm that, Captain," broke

in Lieutenant Danvers. "I had just studied the deck of this craft through my marine glass, and I remember remarking to myself that Radwin appeared to be the only one of this boat's complement who was not on deck."

Fred Radwin was now summoned, Captain Magowan and Jack both plying him with questions. It all came to nothing, however. Radwin remained wholly cool and gave his inquisitors no satisfaction.

Ensign Pike stated that he had had no knowledge of any torpedo having been driven from the "Thor." Yet Pike admitted that this might very easily have happened without his knowing it, since the discharge of a torpedo would hardly make enough noise to carry from below to the after part of the platform deck.

"But, anyway," insisted John Rhinds, blandly, "you must admit, Captain, that our possession of the full number of torpedoes allowed us is proof positive that we haven't been firing even one of them."

"That showing is certainly in your favor, Mr. Rhinds," admitted the president of the naval board, coldly. "I cannot see that the evidence at present available allows of my ordering anyone under arrest. I am bound, in view of the fact that suspicion has pointed your way, to state that I intend to leave the corporal and four,

of the marine privates aboard. On the home cruise a marine sentry will be posted, all the time, close to the after port of your torpedo tube."

"It is humiliating—very," sighed Mr. Rhinds. "Still, I shall be the last to offer any objection to any arrangement that seems wise to the members of the naval board."

The corporal and four of his marines were therefore left under command of Ensign Pike, with instructions to see to it that constant guard was kept by the torpedo tube.

No allusion to the evidence could be made before the members of the cutter's crew on the way back. Captain Magowan led his own party to the office of the commander of the gunboat.

"Er—gentlemen——" began Magowan, slowly, "I must admit that our most elaborate case of circumstantial evidence seems to be knocked into a cocked hat by the one substantial fact that the 'Thor' still has her full number of torpedoes on board."

"Then you don't believe that torpedo came from the 'Thor's' tube, Captain?" asked Jack Benson.

"I don't know what I believe," confessed the president of the board, shaking his head. "It seems to be clearly established that no other submarine was near enough to have fired a tor-

pedo to cover the range. I have just been informed by Commander Ellis that the recovered torpedo has been examined, and has proved to have contained the full war charge. More as a matter of form than anything else we will now order the remaining submarine boats alongside, and have them searched for a missing torpedo.''

That search was accordingly made, but not one of the boats had a torpedo less than the four that it was supposed to carry.

The object of the lightning cruise having been accomplished, in the destruction of the half-sunken derelict, the order was given to sail back to Groton Bay at less speed than had been used on the outward trip.

As far as evidence went the mystery of the attempt to destroy the ''Hastings'' appeared to be as big a mystery as ever.

CHAPTER XIX

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FORCED DOOR

IT was nearly dark, on the day following, when the submarine flotilla made its way up Groton Bay.

As soon as the craft was at its moorings the ''Hastings'' was immediately lighter by the going of one passenger.

Jacob Farnum went post-haste to the hospital, to inquire after David Pollard's condition.

The inventor was in a good deal of pain, yet cheerful. The surgeons reported that his broken bones were healing slowly.

The chauffeur, too, was coming along as well as was possible, though he had been much worse hurt than had the inventor.

Grant Andrews and his workmen were aboard the "Benson." Half of the party was now prepared to come aboard the "Hastings" whenever called.

"Going ashore, Jack?" inquired Eph Somers.

"Not before Mr. Farnum returns. Nor do I believe any of us had better go ashore, without his express permission, old fellow," Benson replied.

Three gentlemen who did go ashore almost immediately after arrival were the members of the naval board.

Soon after, an order came for the removal of all torpedoes from the Rhinds boats. After that the corporal's guard was relieved from duty aboard the "Thor."

"And thus ends that chapter of the story, I reckon," grimly ventured Jack, when he saw the gunboat's cutter convey the corporal's guard away from the Rhinds submarine.

Jacob Farnum came back in the early evening.

Lieutenant Danvers was ashore, which left only the regular crew of the "Hastings" on board. Grant Andrews and his men mounted guard over the two Pollard boats through the night, which left the captain and crew free to sleep—which they did with a royal good will.

No orders came over from the naval board, which fact made it look as though no new tests would be required immediately

The next forenoon, at about ten o'clock, Eph discovered that the Seawold boat was leaving her moorings. Young Somers watched that lesser rival start down the bay before he dropped below to report the fact to Benson.

"What can it mean?" wondered the young captain, going hastily on deck. "Is the Seawold craft going into some test that we're not asked to meet?"

"If so," ventured Hal Hastings, "why isn't one of the gunboats putting out to sea with her."

"Here's Lieutenant Danvers coming off shore," announced Somers. "Perhaps he'll have some news."

Danvers boarded the "Hastings," but the shore boat waited alongside.

"I'm not going to stay. Just dropped alongside for a moment," explained Danvers.

"I thought maybe you were coming on board

so that we could go out on some test," suggested Captain Jack.

"There are to be no tests to-day," replied Danvers.

"Then what's that craft of the Seawold Company doing down the bay by herself?" Benson inquired.

"By Jove, she's going to have company, too," declared Eph. "There goes the Blackson boat out."

"And, probably, you'll soon see the Griffith and Day craft get under way," smiled Lieutenant Danvers.

"What does it mean?" insisted Captain Jack.

"That's the news," replied the naval officer.

Jack waited, somewhat open-mouthed.

"The fact is," continued Lieutenant Danvers, "such tests as we have already had have been sufficient to eliminate four of the six contestants for the favor of the Navy Department. This morning Captain Magowan, as president of the board, received a telegram from the Navy Department to the effect that four of the submarine types had been outclassed. The contest now lies between the Rhinds and the Pollard boats."

"We've beaten the Rhinds boats, too," muttered Jack.

"Yes; though not by such large margins as to rule the Rhinds boats out of all consideration," replied Lieutenant Danvers.

"So the Rhinds boat is to be our rival in future tests—our only rival?" cried Jack, eagerly.

"Yes, and—not speaking as an official, Mr. Benson—I very much incline to the belief that you can go on beating any one of the three Rhinds submarines with either of the pair that you have here. But the point is that the national government may prefer to have two types of boats. It begins to look, as far as indications can point, as though the Secretary of the Navy has some idea of ordering some Pollard boats for the Navy, and also some Rhinds boats."

"I wonder if the Secretary of the Navy has heard anything about the nasty way in which the Rhinds outfit tried to sink us at sea day before yesterday?" muttered Captain Jack, half savagely.

"I imagine some word of the kind has gone on to the Navy Department," replied Danvers, "I really don't know though."

"That nasty trick ought to be enough to bar the Rhinds boats," grumbled Captain Benson.

"But, you see, my dear fellow, there's just one trouble," answered the naval officer. "Think whatever you may please about the guilt of

Rhinds, or of Radwin, or some one under them, but where's the proof? On search the 'Thor' was found to have the full number of torpedoes issued to her. Now, government departments must be guided by evidence."

"Humph!" sighed Jack. "As things have turned out, I'd sooner beat the Rhinds crowd than all the other submarine crowds together."

"I hope you do," rejoined the Lieutenant. "However, my belief is that the government will order some of your company's boats, and some of the Rhinds craft. About the only question, really, is who gets the larger order—and how much larger."

Jacob Farnum had come from his stateroom, and had listened to this talk in silence.

"How do you feel about it, Mr. Farnum?" asked the naval officer.

"I shall have to be satisfied with whatever share of the business my company can secure, of course," replied the shipbuilder. "Yet we know, and so does everyone, that we have proved the Pollard type of boat to be better than its nearest rival."

"Well, success to you all, and the largest measure of it possible!" wished Lieutenant Danvers, rising and shaking hands warmly all around. "For my part, I'd like to see you get orders, at once, for fifty boats, leaving all your

rivals out in the cold. And now I must go on over to the 'Oakland.' "

Messrs. Rhinds and Radwin were on shore, at the hotel, but they had received word of the departure of four of the rival boats, and knew the reason for that departure.

"This," cried John Rhinds, getting up and pacing the room, while he smoked fast, "is the stage at which the game gets on my nerves!"

"Yes," agreed Radwin, though he spoke rather lazily. "It's fine to have only one rival left in the field, but it's discouraging to know that we're number two, and that the other fellow holds number one rank. Rhinds, I wonder if we can really get an order for any of our boats from the government. I hope that we can, at least, get rid of the three that we have on hand."

"Three?" uttered the president of the Rhinds Submarine Company, scornfully. "I'm going to sell the government at least a dozen!"

As he spoke, he struck his clenched fists together angrily.

"How?" asked Radwin.

"And, on the strength of having the United States' order for a dozen boats, I'm certain, then, of being able to place orders for two or three dozen more boats with foreign governments."

"How are you going to place the order for a dozen with the United States government?" insisted Fred Radwin.

"How? By the very simple method of getting all the Congressmen and Senators of our state at work. Fred, I have just about all of the Congressional delegation from our state pestering the Secretary of the Navy until we get our order. The Congressmen from our own state will be glad to see me get the business."

"Why?"

"Don't be a simpleton, Radwin! If we have to build a dozen submarines, we have to hire a lot of workmen, don't we? And I'm always careful to engage workmen who have votes. Besides, such a volume of business would turn loose a lot of new capital and wages in our part of the state. Oh, we can trust our Congressmen, Fred, to get us a big slice of this submarine business."

"I hope our miss-fire trick, out at sea day before yesterday, won't hurt our chances any," whispered Fred Radwin, musingly.

"Why did you do that fool thing?" whispered Rhinds, with a dark look at his secretary.

"Why did I fail, you mean?" hissed Radwin. "Oh, don't try to throw any reproaches at me, now. You were willing enough to help me send that torpedo over at the 'Hastings.'"

"I can't understand how the torpedo missed," shivered Rhinds.

"Well, you were at the wheel," retorted Radwin in a low undertone. "You held the nose of the boat true enough, too, I guess, when I let the torpedo drive. But that infernal Jack Benson was on the watch, and he saw the thing coming. Of course he stopped his boat and put the reverse clutch on just in the nick of time. That young Benson always appears to be in the nick of time!"

"So much so," wavered John Rhinds, "that I'm beginning to feel decidedly superstitious about that young fellow. He'll land us, yet, in something, and ruin us."

"No, he won't!" hissed Radwin, sharply. "Benson hasn't landed us yet, has he? And he's not going to, either! I've one or two rods in pickle for that forward young scamp, and I'll serve him to a fare-you-well yet! Rhinds, I may yet find a way that will insure our getting *all* the submarine orders!"

"You're ingenious enough, I know, Fred," admitted the older man, in a worried voice. "I hope you'll win for us. It will be money enough in your pocket to satisfy even you, Fred. Still, I'm worried by the way your plans against Benson have already missed fire."

Out in the hallway, at that moment, they

heard a voice that made them both start. The voice was not loud, but it was angry, determined, and carried well. It was the voice of a man sweeping aside the objections of a hotel servant.

"Don't tell me they're not in, you idiot!"

"The servant I paid to be on the lookout is trying to steer away some one that insists on seeing us," whispered Fred Radwin, listening intently.

"Neither of the gentlemen are in, I tell you, sir," replied the hotel servant, doggedly.

"Get out of the way, fellow! I know the number of their suite of rooms, and I'm going to it. I don't want to hurt you, fellow, but I'm the Chief of Police, and I mean to see Mr. Radwin without delay!"

"The Chief of Police!" gasped Radwin, feeling his knees weaken under him.

He and Rhinds stared uneasily at each other.

"You see him first," whispered Fred Radwin. "I've some things in my pockets that I wouldn't want the chief of police to find. Hold the police fellow by telling him I'll be right in."

With that Radwin slipped to the door of a connecting room in the suite. He passed through, closing the door noiselessly and slipping the key in the lock.

An instant later John Rhinds opened his door out into the hallway.

"Who is it to see us?" he called.

"It's I, Ward, the Chief of Police," replied the caller, stepping into the room. "You are Mr.——"

"Rhinds."

"I wish to see your Mr. Radwin. I have a message for him."

"Be seated, Chief," urged the rascal. "Mr. Radwin will be here in a moment."

"Where is Radwin now?" demanded the chief.

"In the next room. He'll be here in a moment."

"Did he go through that door?" asked Chief Ward.

"Yes."

"Then I'll see him at once," replied the official.

He stepped over and tried the knob of the door. Finding the bolt shot, Chief Ward promptly put his stalwart shoulder to the door. At the second bump the door yielded. Ward burst into the next room, then on to the third.

"Why did you trick me, Mr. Rhinds?" called the chief, angrily.

"I? Why—I——"

Radwin was not to be found.

The Chief of Police, angry at being baffled in his search for Radwin, went away declaring that he would have an order issued for the arrest of Rhinds as an accessory.

CHAPTER XX

CAPTAIN JACK PULLS A NEW STRING

RADWIN did not return.

Though looking outwardly composed, John C. Rhinds passed the next few hours in a condition of internal unrest.

Why did Chief Ward want to see Fred Radwin? And why had the latter tricked himself off out of sight?

These questions tormented Rhinds the more because he could not even invent satisfactory answers to them.

"Is the chief of police acting on anyone else's orders?" quavered the old man. "Has Fred betrayed himself in anything he has done? Is he a fugitive from justice? Oh, mercy! What a situation just when I am trying to put the deals through that shall make the Rhinds Submarine Company the richest concern of its kind in the world!"

By the middle of the afternoon Rhinds heard

the newsboys calling something excitedly down in the street.

"What's that? What's that?" gasped the old man, holding one hand to his ear. "Sounds like 'Dastardly plot—submarine mystery.' Can it be anything to injure our chances?"

As he looked down into the street, from the altitude of the third floor window, Rhinds saw that, whatever the news, the boys appeared to be selling papers fast.

For a few seconds Rhinds wavered. Then he crossed the room to the telephone.

"Send me up the latest editions of the newspapers," he 'phoned the clerk in the office. After that he lighted a big, black cigar—and waited, mopping the perspiration from his forehead.

After a few moments there came a knock at the door, and Rhinds opened it. He noticed that the bell-boy looked at him somewhat queerly as the papers were handed over. Then, having closed the door and locked it, John Rhinds sank into a chair, holding up three newspapers, in turn, and scanning the big, black headlines.

Yes; here it all was—the whole story in every essential detail. It told of the mysterious attempt to destroy the "Hastings" at the end of the lightning cruise. The stories contained Lieutenant Danvers's statement that the

"Thor" had been headed toward the "Hastings" just a few seconds before the torpedo passed the Pollard boat's bows. There was an account of the naval party's search of the "Thor," and the fact that the latter craft was found to have her full number of torpedoes on board was set forth in all fairness. Oh, yes! The story was fair enough! No newspapermen could have been fairer than had the chroniclers of this exciting submarine news. There were no accusations against Rhinds or his associates —nothing but the fair, unbiased telling of facts. And yet, in almost any reader's mind the opinion would be quick to form that only from the "Thor" could the treacherous torpedo have been fired.

"Oh, it's—it's awful!" cried John Rhinds, waving the papers over his head like a madman.

Jack Benson had played his master stroke in this new game.

In former times, when the Pollard boats had been all but unknown, Captain Jack had been quick to grasp the importance of newspaper fame. As told in the second volume of this series, Jack had once invited a big party of newspaper folks to Dunhaven, to observe some startling performances by the Pollard boat. At that time he had given them a programme so full of excitement that the fame of the Pollard

boat had been flashed over the country, and the Navy Department had found public opinion clamoring for the United States Navy to own and control a few of these wonderful craft.

And now, Jack Benson, wholly and absolutely convinced of the guilt of Rhinds and Radwin, had gone to the local daily newspaper offices with his account of what had happened out at sea.

It was a great stroke. Yet Captain Jack had not undertaken it without first having secured the permission of Jacob Farnum. After Jack went to the newspaper offices the Colfax reporters had busied themselves with interviewing naval officers, including members of the naval board.

And now the story was out, for the world to read. Yet it was a statement only of bare, easily proved facts. The newspapers were glad to have such a startling yarn, and it had been told in such a way that John Rhinds did not have a single chance in any suit he might bring for libel.

After the first shock that the discovery caused him, John C. Rhinds began to suspect Jack's hand in this straight-from-the-shoulder blow.

"It's that young Benson again!" he raged, silently, rising and stamping on the offending,

yet truth-telling, newspapers. "And this will get beyond Colfax! The newspapers of the larger cities will begin to hear of this by evening. To-night this whole yarn will be flashing over the telegraph wires of the country. To-morrow morning millions of people will be reading this awful stuff. Oh, if I could only tear that young fellow to pieces!"

John Rhinds gnashed his teeth in his fury. Had he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror, just then, the man would have been afraid of his own reflection.

Yet, with all his guilty knowledge of what he had encouraged Radwin to do, it did not occur to Rhinds to lay the blame anywhere except upon the shoulders of honest, though hard-fighting, Captain Jack Benson.

Presently, John Rhinds cooled down.

He even became suave and smiling—though under the smile a ghastly pallor lay on his cheeks.

This change of outward temper was all because he was forced to become crafty before others.

It is a common way with many newspapers to leap on a man and trounce him, figuratively speaking, and then to send reporters around to see how the victim has enjoyed the flaying.

That was what happened to John Rhinds.

Within half an hour after the newspapers

had come to him a message over the telephone from the hotel office informed the president of the Rhinds Submarine Company that a reporter was below who wished to interview Mr. Rhinds.

"Ah! Er—huh!" choked the wretch, swallowing hard. "Have the young gentleman shown up, of course. And send up any other reporters who may ask for me."

By the time that the first reporter reached the door Rhinds had carefully removed all traces of the torn newspapers. The old man was calm. He even smiled slightly, though he affected to be stung to the soul by the thought that any American could think that he, or any of his party aboard the "Thor" could have been guilty of such a fearful attempt of crime.

"But of course, young man," urged Rhinds, suavely, "you will be able, through the great power of the press for right, to set all suspicions at rest. You will, I beg of you, give renewed publicity to the fact that we were found to have our full number of torpedoes aboard. That one fact, of course, disposes of any suspicion that we could have thought of doing such a fearful thing."

The reporter was young, but he was not lacking in shrewdness. This boyish-looking journalist had interviewed smooth-talking scoundrels before.

"There is one little point I would like to inquire about, Mr. Rhinds," hinted this reporter, chewing at the end of his pencil.

"A dozen—a hundred points—anything you want to know!" protested the man who was being interviewed.

"Thank you," nodded the reporter, coolly. "Now, it is a well-established fact that you had your full number of torpedoes aboard, when the naval officers searched. But have you any place on board the 'Thor' that would serve as a hiding place for an extra torpedo—an extra torpedo that might, let us say, have been obtained in any one of a number of ways?"

John C. Rhinds began to feel great waves of chill passing up and down his spine. Hang this smiling, boyish reporter! Rhinds began to feel that he hated this young man next to Jack Benson!

"No!" shouted the interviewed one, hoarsely, angrily. "We have no such hiding place on board. We have no place that could be used for hiding an extra torpedo."

The reporter nodded, then continued with a cool smile:

"Thank you, Mr. Rhinds, for answering so important a question on such a vitally important point. It is very important to have the sus-

picion disposed of that such a hiding place might exist."

"Very important," confirmed John Rhinds, leaning forward in his most impressive manner. "And you have my authority for settling the point for good and all."

"So that, of course, Mr. Rhinds," pursued the cool, smiling young reporter, "you will be most glad when I suggest to you the importance of allowing a commission composed of, say, an editor and two reporters from the 'Gazette' to go aboard the 'Thor,' search for such a hiding place, and then be prepared to inform the world that no such hiding place exists on the 'Thor.' "

That proposition came like a torpedo itself; it struck, too, below the water-line of John Rhinds's hard-won composure.

"Why do you——?" he stammered. Then the wretch forced himself to be cool again.

"No, my young friend, I am sorry to say that that would not be practicable. You see, a submarine craft is full of secrets. Outside of our own crew none but officers of the Navy can be permitted to go below the platform deck of any of my boats."

"Oh, well, then," nodded the reporter, "the 'Gazette' can clamor for a naval board to be appointed to make the search, and at once. That will serve the purpose as well, Mr. Rhinds—and

it will answer the most burning question that the public will want to ask."

Then came the other reporters. Rhinds saw them all, wore before them all the mask of wounded innocence, showed them all how easily they might allay all public suspicions.

Then, when the last reporter had departed, John Rhinds, feeling too weak to stand, sank down upon a sofa, covering his face with his hands. Thus, for some time he lay, hardly giving signs of life. His fright was great, indeed.

In striking this blow young Captain Jack Benson had struck far harder than he had even dreamed.

When Rhinds began to realize things once more he missed Fred Radwin—Radwin, the seeming fugitive, who had run away from his foul leader at the first sound of a police voice.

Still, it was possible that Radwin was not far away. Possible, also, that in this fact lay the greatest danger that had ever menaced Jack Benson.

CHAPTER XXI

JACK MEETS A HUMAN FACT, FACE TO FACE

THERE was no thought of dinner for John Rhinds that evening.

After the newspaper men had gone the artful schemer spent a long time in drafting two or three telegrams that he felt it necessary to send to members of his state's Congressional delegation at Washington.

In the telegrams that were finally sent, the president of the Rhinds Submarine Company referred to himself as apparently the victim of a very clever but diabolical plot to ruin his company. He asked the members of Congress for his state to see to it that he was given a full opportunity for justice.

"Justice? Ugh!" muttered the old man, as he scanned one of his telegrams. "Well—er—not if it means punishment!"

Hardly had he sent away these telegrams, and even as he was giving thought to sending down an order to have dinner served in his rooms, Rhinds received a telegram from the editor of a New York daily, asking for his version of the torpedo mystery.

From the wording of the telegram, it was

plain that the story had gotten as far as New York, and that the editor regarded it as the big, sensational news story of the hour.

Groaning, Rhinds bent over to begin work on this new telegram that was demanded of him. It proved to be a hard message to write. Even while he worked over the difficult problem, a second telegram arrived, this from the editor of a Philadelphia morning paper. Then came two from Boston.

"Good heavens! I can't keep up this pace," groaned John Rhinds. "These editors won't even give me time for sleep."

Sudden blackness came over his eyes as he sat back, trying to think it all out.

"I can't answer any of these telegrams," he muttered, tearing up the offending messages. "Oh, why did Radwin have to take wings at the very time when I need him most! Fred Radwin, with his cool nerve, his steely eyes and his glib, lying tongue, would have been ready with answers for all these questions. But I can't do it. I'll need a strait-jacket, if these telegrams continue to arrive!"

Yet several more telegrams did come in, from newspapers in various Eastern states. Rhinds read them, groaned and tore up the messages.

Then he smoked strong cigars, one after another, but that only made his nerves worse.

When he went to bed, late that night, he slept some, yet it was mainly to dream hideous dreams.

In the early morning Rhinds sent for morning newspapers. These contained what he had said to local reporters, but his version, with the newspapers' comments added, only made matters worse. "That infernal 'Gazette,'" in especial, printed, in bold type, the account of his refusal to let a committee of newspapermen examine his boat for a secret hiding place large enough to hold an extra torpedo.

That forenoon shore boats did a thriving business in carrying people out on trips around the Pollard and Rhinds submarines. Trains brought in folks from other towns, all anxious for a glimpse of the submarine craft.

"This will drive me wild, yet," groaned Mr. Rhinds. "It's an outrageous shame."

Still, there was little realization, on his part, that he deserved all this, and more.

* * * * * * * * * *

"Jack, my boy," muttered Jacob Farnum, looking up from a batch of morning newspapers in the cabin of the "Hastings," "you've been the means of stirring up a bigger hurricane than ever raged at sea."

"Are you sorry?" asked the young submarine captain, coolly.

"Well, considering my private opinion of Mr. John C. Rhinds, and my belief as to what he did—or tried to do—to us, I can't say I'm deeply grieved," returned the shipbuilder.

Then the shipbuilder looked around him, at all three of the submarine boys, as he went on:

"Lads, we've been cramped up on this boat long enough, so I'm going to take you ashore this evening. But remember—not a word to reporters, or to anyone else. If any one of you opens his mouth on this subject, I shall consider that young man no longer a friend of mine."

All this while Chief Ward, of the Colfax police department, was busily engaged in seeking tidings of the missing Fred Radwin. But Radwin, after entering that adjoining room, appeared to have been swallowed up.

Jack had heard, from the chief of police, of the disappearance of Radwin. This was one feature of the story that the newspapers had as yet failed to discover. However, Ward believed that Radwin was now hundreds of miles away, and still traveling. So, when the Pollard submarine party came ashore that evening, none of them gave much thought to Radwin.

Farnum led his young friends, as heretofore, to the Somerset House.

"We might possibly meet Rhinds in the lobby, or in the dining room," said the ship-

builder, "but I don't deem it likely. Rhinds is undoubtedly keeping hid within his own walls upstairs."

This guess proved to be a good one. Farnum and his friends dined at the Somerset without being offended by a sight of the face of their rival in business.

A special waiter was stationed to head off reporters or other curious people who might attempt to interview the submarine diners. So the meal proceeded in peace, though it was rather late when the diners finished.

"Whew! Nearly nine o'clock," muttered Farnum, glancing up at a big clock on a near-by wall. "And I haven't been out to the hospital, to-day, to see how Dave is coming along."

"Would it do to telephone, and ask the hospital people to let Mr. Pollard know you had inquired?" suggested Hal.

"I don't just like that idea," replied Mr. Farnum, shaking his head. "It doesn't sound just like using Dave Pollard right. I'll tell you what, however. I've been the only one to go out to the hospital, so far. Dave always asks after the rest of you. Jack, suppose you take a hack and make the trip out. If they won't let you see Dave at this hour, then inquire how he is getting along, and leave your card to be sent in to him. But, if you can see Dave Pollard,

he'll be delighted to have a look at your face. There's a cab standing out in front of the hotel, and it won't take you but a few minutes to get out to the hospital."

"Where'll I find you?" asked Jack, rising at once.

"We'll wait in the lobby of the hotel until you get back. Use the cab both ways."

There was, as Mr. Farnum had said, a cab outside the hotel. That cab, in fact, had been hanging about since just before dark.

Most of the time it stood drawn up at the curb on the opposite side of the street.

Three or four times, during the early evening, different persons had tried to engage the use of this cab.

Yet, to each prospective customer, the driver had shaken his head, uttering the one word:

"Engaged."

So the cab still waited, the driver occasionally moving to a somewhat new position, though always keeping well in sight of the hotel entrance.

As Captain Jack Benson stepped out through the broad doorway, however, on his errand of friendship, the driver, throwing away a half-smoked cigar, suddenly whipped up his horse, driving close to the entrance.

"Cab, sir" hailed the driver. "To any part of the city."

"You know where the hospital is?" inquired Jack Benson.

"Oh, yes."

"How long will it take to drive me there?"

"Ten or twelve minutes."

"All right. And I shall want you to wait there, a little while, and then bring me back. How much will that be?"

"Dollar and a half, sir."

"Go ahead," directed Jack, springing inside and pulling the door shut.

The only time Benson had been to the hospital before was on the morning of the accident.

At that time he had not noticed the road very closely. Now, at night, all looked so different to him that he had no idea whether or not he was being driven in the right direction. He left all that to the driver, as most people do when employing cabs.

"I'd like just a little peep-in at Rhinds to-night," thought Jack, as he settled back against the comfortable upholstery. "I reckon he knows, by this time, something of the way of the transgressor."

If the young submarine captain noticed anything at all of the way the driver was taking him, he saw only that the vehicle was rolling through a quiet, rather shabby, ill-lighted portion of the city.

Thus the cab went, down street after street, the horses moving only at the slowest trot.

"What this cab needs is one of our gasoline engines," thought Jack, lazily. Then, suddenly:

"No, sir! By gracious, no! That would make an automobile out of this old tub on wheels, and, until Mr. Pollard gets whole again, anyway, we've had enough of automobiles. One of our crowd in hospital, at a time, is plenty!"

Then there came a moment in which the cab stopped so suddenly that the young skipper was all but thrown from his seat.

"Gracious!" uttered the submarine boy. "Who's torpedoing us?"

But, at that instant, Jack Benson received a more genuine shock.

For the left-hand door of the vehicle was wrenched suddenly open. In the doorway appeared the white, ugly, desperate face of Fred Radwin!

Without a word, Radwin threw himself forward, making a leap into the carriage.

You—Get—Out!

CHAPTER XXII

A CORNERED SUBMARINE CAPTAIN

"YOU—get—out!"

Quick as thought Jack Benson raised his left foot, planting it, as vigorously as his sitting position allowed, against the ribs of Fred Radwin.

That worthy, one foot on the sill, and bent in the act of entering fell back, going in a heap to the sidewalk.

Benson fairly hurled himself through the open door in his need of reaching the sidewalk in time.

He stood, now waiting for a second or so.

Then Fred Radwin jumped up, prepared to grapple with this young foeman.

But Jack was ready for that. He had ready a handy sailor jab—a short-arm blow with the fist that sent Radwin once more to the sidewalk.

Then, as scientific boxing rules were not called for in an encounter of this kind, Jack followed up his advantages with two severe kicks.

Down from the seat leaped the driver, heavy whip in hand.

"Oh, you're in this, are you?" panted Jack,

seeing that the driver was headed straight for him.

Down low ducked the submarine boy; then came up straight at close quarters. Benson's sudden grapple deprived the driver of a chance to use the butt of his whip in the manner the fellow had intended.

Yet the driver was a powerful fellow, his strength making him about a match for the greater agility of the bronzed young skipper.

Jack managed to land a blow or two against his big assailant, though without doing much harm.

Yet the submarine boy was undismayed and confident, until, out of the corner of one eye, he saw Radwin rising and advancing cautiously to close in.

Young Benson's opportunity came at just that instant. Smack! He landed his right fist in the driver's face, almost dazing him. With the left fist Jack struck himself free.

But Radwin was just upon him as the boy turned.

"No, you don't!" mocked Captain Jack, ducking down, kangaroo-fashion. "Day-day!"

That low crouch and the following spring had carried the submarine boy just under Fred Radwin's outstretched right arm.

And now, Jack Benson, being past both of his

assailants, took refuge in discreet flight. In fact, he ran down the street with about every pound of human steam turned on.

"Come on!" snarled Radwin, setting the sprinting pace. "We've got to catch that rascally boy, and mighty quick, too!"

This block or two of the street appeared to be deserted. There was no telling, however, how soon the submarine boy might run into two or three real men who would take his side in any scrimmage that was due.

Though Radwin had the first start after Jack, and was running well, the driver, a long-legged fellow with splendid "wind" soon passed his leader.

Jack realized that he was in danger of being caught, and tried to put on a greater burst of speed. Yet the driver came closer and closer.

Whizz-zz!

The driver had aimed his heavy whip, lance-fashion, and butt-end first, and launched it after the fugitive.

Had not Jack turned the instant before, to glance backward, the whip would have struck him in the back of the head. But Benson saw it coming, and threw himself forward, his head well down.

The whip, therefore, flew just over his head, striking the sidewalk ahead of him.

At that moment Jack Benson tripped. He did not mean to do it. He simply fell and landed on his knees, his head low.

On came the sprinting driver. It was too late to stop or turn. Over Jack Benson plunged the fellow, then landed in a heap on the sidewalk.

Jack was up like a flash. He heard a yell from the driver, but Benson's gaze was upon the whip.

At a bound the submarine boy possessed himself of this weapon. He got it, just in time, too, to wheel and face Fred Radwin, threatening that fellow with the heavy butt-end of the driver's recent weapon.

"Get up behind the boy, you fool!" hissed Radwin.

"Sure, I can't," moaned the fellow, rubbing himself, real anguish sounding in his voice. "My neck's broke!"

"Come on yourself, Radwin!" mocked Jack, backing against the wall of a house so that he could face either assailant at need.

"Drop that whip, and I will!" hissed Fred Radwin, stealthily manœuvring about the boy, yet held back by a wholesome awe of that butt-end of the whip.

"No; I like this whip too well," chuckled young Benson. "You can't have it unless you take it from me. Want to try?"

"Come on, and get up, you dolt!" growled Radwin to the driver. "Do you think we have all night to settle with this boy?"

"I can't get up, I tell you. I'm no good," moaned the driver. "I don't know what I did to myself when I went down so hard."

"Hurry up!" insisted Radwin. "A crowd may come along at any moment."

"Let 'em," moaned the driver. "I can't stop it. I'll apologize."

At that very moment there came the sound of a shout further down the street. Other voices answered.

"There, you dolt!" cried Radwin, angrily. "Now, you've wasted our last chance. Here comes a mob!"

Backing off, Radwin grabbed up his useless comrade, forcing the driver to his feet.

Seeing his enemy so occupied, Jack Benson edged off, holding the whip so that he could use it.

From down the street came the sound of flying feet. Then, just as suddenly the speed lessened.

"I'll wait until I get help, and I'll grab this pair," muttered Captain Jack. "The police chief will be delighted at having a good, close look at Fred Radwin!"

At that moment loud yells and coarse cries

broke from the eight or ten young men down the street. Then fist-blows sounded.

"Mine's a Chinaman's luck," grunted Jack Benson, disgustedly. "Only a gang of drunken hoodlums down there. They'd stand in with anything that is against the police. No use depending on such human cattle."

Jack, in fact, grasped the significance of the new riot a little before Fred Radwin did. The submarine boy, therefore, wheeled and ran swiftly toward the fighting hoodlums, though wholly intent on getting past them.

Radwin, believing that the young skipper was racing for help, dragged his driver-companion roughly, swiftly along, finally pushing him inside the hack. Then Radwin leaped to the box, gathered up the reins, and was away like a flash.

The young submarine skipper, from what he knew of hoodlum street crowds, hurried by on the other side. Two blocks further along Benson encountered a tardy policeman. Knowing that it was now too late to hope to catch Fred Radwin, Jack contented himself with inquiring the way back to the Somerset House, where he arrived, after a long walk, still carrying the whip as his trophy of the late encounter.

"You'll have to telephone the hospital, after all, I'm afraid," muttered the young skipper,

when he met Mr. Farnum and the others in the lobby.

"What happened?" demanded Farnum, eyeing the whip curiously.

"As soon as I can get through with telephoning the chief of police, I'll come back and tell you."

Chief Ward responded in person. He examined the whip, then declared:

"I know the fellow this whip belongs to—Claridy, 'the fox,' as his admiring friends call him. He's a bad character. See; here is a fox's head engraved on the whip-stock. I'll do my best to find Claridy, and, in that way, I may find the fellow, Radwin. But you were wise, Benson, in not trying to enlist help from that hoodlum gang. Our hoodlums are as bad and lawless as are to be found anywhere in the United States."

CHAPTER XXIII

A COWARD'S LAST DITCH

IN the morning the Somerset House was favored by two rather distinguished guests. One was Rear Admiral Townsley, the other Congressman Simms. The two had come down together from Washington on the night train.

While the admiral communicated at once with Captain Magowan, Congressman Simms sent his card up to John C. Rhinds. The latter, all a-quiver, now, and showing a haggard face in which smiles fought for a chance, received his visitor.

"Well, Rhinds," was the Congressman's greeting, "the country is all stirred up over this submarine incident out at sea. So is the Navy Department, which is bound to respond to public opinion in such a case."

"I'm glad you've come," replied Mr. Rhinds, eagerly. "I look to you to save me from a most unpleasant, most unmerited charge."

"No charge has been made against you—yet," replied the Congressman.

"I should have said a suspicion," replied Rhinds, tremulously.

"That suspicion seems to be pretty general," answered the member of Congress. "Have you anything to smoke here?"

Rhinds, with an almost childish eagerness, brought forth a box of cigars, adding:

"I'll ring and order breakfast served for you here, while we talk."

"Thank you, no," responded the Congressman. "I've got to move fast to-day, for I can't spend much time here. I suppose you don't know, yet, that Admiral Townsley is here—sent

by the Secretary of the Navy to investigate and report on this matter."

"You'll see him—you'll make him understand, won't you?" demanded Rhinds, eagerly.

"You can't make Townsley understand anything but facts," replied Mr. Simms, dryly. "I know the man. He's a hard-headed truth-seeker. You see, Rhinds, when I received your telegram, I hurried over to the Navy Department to say what I could for you. The Secretary told me that of course he didn't want you injured by any unjust suspicions."

"Of course not," quivered Rhinds.

"At the same time the Secretary made it plain to me that public sentiment demands that the whole case be brought past the suspicion stage. He advised me to come down here with Townsley, and see, for myself, just what I ought to believe."

"You'll act as my friend, won't you?" begged Rhinds, tremulously. "You'll show Townsley the absurdity of this whole business. Simms, I look to your friendship, for you are my friend, aren't you?"

"Possibly," nodded the other, dryly. "But I'm also a Congressman, responsible to my district, my state and the whole country. Now, Rhinds, the whole thing is just here. I'm going to look into this matter, and I'm going to

sift it all I can. If I find you're innocent beyond a question—then—well, you know I'm a pretty good fighter."

"Yes, yes; you'll fight my enemies to a standstill," cried Rhinds, piteously.

"But, if I find the facts against you, then my hands are tied."

"If—if it's a question of money——" stammered the submarine man.

"Money?" demanded the Congressman, crisply. "What for?"

"Why—er—er—for expenses."

"I can pay my own expenses, Rhinds, in a matter that affects the good name of my district. Now, give me your side of this affair."

For an hour the two men remained talking. Rhinds fought for himself as hard as he could, for he was beginning to suspect that a mere matter of politics would not move the Congressman much in this case.

"Now, I'll leave you for a while, Rhinds, and I'll move fast," promised the Congressman, rising. "But I advise you to stay right here. I may want to see you at any moment."

Mr. Simms must have moved rapidly, for, two hours later that morning, after having seen many people, including the admiral, the Congressman sent a message upstairs urging Rhinds to come down at once.

As he stepped out from the elevator, a strange pallor on his face, John Rhinds beheld the Congressman standing with four men one of whom the old man knew for Ensign Pike, the naval officer who had been stationed aboard the 'Thor.' Another was Lieutenant Danvers.

Congressman Simms quickly presented Rhinds to the other two, one of whom was Rear Admiral Townsley, and the other Lieutenant Jasper, the Admiral's aide.

"Now, Mr. Rhinds," pursued the Congressman, "the admiral has decided that the first thing to do is to go aboard the 'Thor,' and see whether any hiding place exists in which you might have stored a fifth torpedo."

"But how could I get such a fifth torpedo?" faltered the old man. "The Navy issues them."

"They may be bought in the market, too, by one who knows how," replied Rear Admiral Townsley, coolly. "You consent to our going aboard your boat, of course, Mr. Rhinds?"

Had there been any reasonable way of preventing it, Rhinds would not have agreed, but he saw that he must comply with the request.

Admiral Townsley raised a hand in signal. Out of the background came Jacob Farnum and his three submarine boys.

"These people can't come aboard my boat!" protested Rhinds.

"They must, if we do," retorted the admiral, crisply. "These are the human beings who were placed in deadly peril by the torepdo that has yet to be accounted for."

Rhinds no longer objected. All his force, all his will appeared to have departed. He moved along, now, like a puppet.

Down at the water-front a naval launch was in waiting. In this the entire party was taken out to the "Thor." Captain Driggs received the callers on the platform deck, and Admiral Townsley stated the object of the visit.

"Why, Admiral," replied Captain Driggs, honestly, "I have no knowledge that there was an extra torpedo aboard. Yet, of course, there's a place where such a thing might have been hidden."

"Take us to it," requested the Admiral.

Captain Driggs led the visitors below. There, in the cabin floor, he pointed to a well-concealed trapdoor. It opened upon a very considerable space between cabin floor and keel.

"This space certainly *would* accommodate a torpedo," declared Admiral Townsley. "Mr. Rhinds, if we could prove that you had a torpedo in this space the other day, there would be an almost complete case, wouldn't there?"

"But I didn't have," cried Rhinds, with cunning insistence.

"Mr. Driggs," pursued the admiral, "we shall want you as a witness at the investigation on board the 'Oakland.' My aide will hand you a subpoena. This, I believe, gentlemen, is all we have to do here."

Looking years older, yet holding up his head in a certain kind of bravado, John Rhinds returned to shore with the party.

No sooner had Rhinds entered the hotel than a bell-boy moved over, drawing him aside and saying something in a low tone.

"I'll wager that talk would interest us, if we could hear it," remarked Jack Benson, sarcastically, to his friends.

Rhinds, however, turned and hurried off. In five minutes he was back in the lobby. Eagerly he glanced about for the Farnum party, and located it. Then he moved over to where Farnum and his submarine boys sat.

"Farnum," breathed the old man, anxiously, "I've a favor to ask of you."

"That's strange," replied the shipbuilder, coolly.

"I won't term it a favor, then," went on the other, restlessly. "I will put it another way. As a simple act of justice will you meet two people whom I want you to hear?"

"I've heard a good deal, lately," answered Farnum, reluctantly.

"I ask this as a matter of justice. Won't you and young Benson step down the corridor with me?"

"How long will this interview take?" demanded Farnum.

"Only a very short time."

"Well, lead on, then."

Farnum and Captain Jack stepped down a corridor in the wake of their enemy.

Rhinds led them into the ladies' parlor. Farnum and Jack caught sight of two anxious-faced women—one, a refined woman of middle age, the other a beautiful girl of sixteen.

"Mr. Farnum, and Mr. Benson, my dear," announced John Rhinds, in oily tones. "Gentlemen, my wife, and my daughter, Helen. Both have something to say to you, gentlemen. Be seated, won't you?"

With that Rhinds slipped away. Like many another cur, in the hour when he finds himself driven to the wall, John Rhinds had sent for his wife and daughter. He proposed to escape from the consequences of his rascally acts by hiding behind the skirts of pure and good women who had the strange fortune to have their lives linked with his.

"What is all this that I have heard, sir?" asked Mrs. Rhinds, tears filling her eyes fast, as she turned to regard the Dunhaven shipbuilder.

It was the hardest hour Jacob Farnum had ever spent, and the same was true for Jack Benson.

This wife and daughter had the most absolute faith in the goodness of John Rhinds. They pleaded gently, eloquently, for these two enemies to have faith in their husband and father.

"You surely don't believe that Mr. Rhinds was at the bottom of any such scoundrelly plot as the papers are talking about?" asked Mrs. Rhinds, tearfully, at last.

"Madame," replied Farnum, in the gentlest tone he knew how to use, "I'll admit I don't like to believe it."

"And you'll come out in a public interview, saying you're convinced that the whole story is a monstrous lie, won't you?" pleaded the wife.

Jacob Farnum choked.

"I—I can't promise that, Mrs. Rhinds. You'll never believe how hard it is for me to refuse you."

"Then you do believe my husband guilty?" demanded Mrs. Rhinds, in a voice full of agony.

"Oh, I wish I could say what you want me

to, Mrs. Rhinds, but—well, all I can do is to remain silent."

"Can't I say something—something?" asked Helen Rhinds, appealingly. Her moist eyes turned first on Mr. Farnum, then on Captain Jack.

"Ladies," confessed the Dunhaven shipbuilder, "you've already said enough, as I looked at your faces, to make me almost feel that I am one of the worst men alive."

"Oh, no, no, no!" protested the girl. "You are going to prove yourself the most generous."

Then, turning, the girl caught at one of Benson's hands appealingly.

"You urge him!" she begged.

"When the chief has spoken I must be silent," Jack answered, clearly, though in a low voice.

"What can you say to us, Mr. Farnum? What will you say?" cried Mrs. Rhinds, desperately.

"Madame," replied the Dunhaven shipbuilder, "all I can say is this: I will not, of myself make any effort to bring your husband before a court. I will make no effort to have the investigation carried any further. That is all I can say. Jack, if you have anything to say to these ladies that will soften my words, then, in the name of mercy, say it."

"Ladies," spoke Captain Jack Benson, looking mother and daughter full in the eye, in turn, "you have heard the extent of Mr. Farnum's promise. He is a man who lives by the rules of justice. You are the only two in the world who could have wrung from him such a promise as you have secured."

With that Farnum and his young captain succeeded in taking their leave—making their escape, as they felt, from a most trying situation.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

WITHIN two hours John C. Rhinds had his head up once more.

He felt as though the battle had been already won. There was nothing to fear from Farnum pushing the situation that had been created against the owner of the "Thor," for Farnum had promised. It was strange that John Rhinds, who had no regard for the moral value of his own given word, felt certain that Jacob Farnum would not break a promise.

Rhinds even telephoned for the reporters, and, when they came, gave out an interview in which he stated that Mr. Farnum was satisfied that no blame over the torpedo incident could

be attached to the owner of the "Thor." Farnum, when questioned by the same reporters, declared that he had nothing to say.

That night Rhinds was almost cheerful. He dined in the public dining room of the hotel, with his wife and daughter, and both appeared to be wholly proud of the man.

One thing, however, worried Rhinds a good deal. Congressman Simms did not come near him again. Later in the evening Rhinds sought the Congressman, though wholly in vain.

Rhinds breakfasted with his family, the next morning, in their rooms. So he was still behind his private doors when a summons reached him to go to the wharf and take the launch to the "Oakland."

"What can it mean, John?" demanded his wife.

"If they want you as a witness before the investigation, you'll be able to clear yourself quickly," predicted Helen.

"I'll soon find out why I'm wanted," declared Rhinds, jauntily.

In fact, he was almost cheerful as he boarded the launch at the wharf. Rhinds was at least self-possessed when he was shown into a cabin where Captain Magowan was seated at a desk.

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Rhinds," was the greeting of the president of the naval board, as

he rose. "My business will take but a very few moments. I have received definite orders from the Navy Department by wire this morning. Here is a copy of the telegram."

Rhinds took the message, and read:

"Inform John C. Rhinds that the Department will give no further consideration, this year, to the purchase of any boats from the Rhinds Submarine Company."

"What does this mean?" demanded Rhinds, paling, then flushing with anger.

"Just what it says," replied Captain Magowan, coolly.

"There has been some underhanded work here!" began the old man, wrathfully.

"None in the Navy Department, at all events," replied Magowan, coolly. "I will not detain you longer, Mr. Rhinds. Good morning."

Captain Magowan, bowing, opened the door. A marine sentry stood on post just outside. There was no use in making a row. John C. Rhinds stepped out like one in a daze, and remained so until he reached the wharf and stepped ashore.

To the railway station went Rhinds. He was ruined. The order from Washington meant that all his capital had been expended on boats that could not be sold. There might be a

chance with foreign governments, but creditors would step in and seize the Rhinds shipyards before a good trade could be made abroad.

At the station Rhinds counted the money he had about him. At a bank in another city was a thousand dollars or so more. Rhinds took the train and was borne away. His wife and daughter? The former had a small private fortune of her own; wife and daughter would not starve. So the coward ran away.

That same forenoon Farnum and his submarine boys were summoned to police headquarters. There they were confronted with a rather pretty though almost poorly dressed girl.

"Is this the young woman whom you rescued at a street corner, and whom you were escorting when attacked by a gang of rowdies?" asked Chief Ward.

"I don't know," smiled Eph. "The young woman I was walking with had on a veil."

"Oh, that's all right," laughed the police chief. "This young woman is Katharine Pitney. She has told me the whole story, and I am satisfied that she has told me everything honestly. Miss Pitney is not a prisoner. She has made a little mistake in becoming engaged to the wrong sort of fellow—the 'Tom' from whom you tried to defend her. Now, it seems that 'Tom'—which isn't his name, had per-

suaded her to help him in playing a joke, as he explained it to her. So Miss Pitney was foolish enough to agree. She is wholly sorry, now she knows that it was a crime, not a joke in which she helped. And 'Tom' has received his walking papers so far as Miss Pitney is concerned."

"But I beg you'll forgive me, Mr. Somers," spoke up the girl, anxiously. "I honestly believed it was a joke that I was helping in. As soon as Mr. Ward found me, I told him the whole truth about the matter."

"You certainly did, Miss Pitney," confirmed the chief.

"Why, I haven't anything to forgive," laughed Eph. "It was a joke, the way it turned out."

Chief Ward escorted Miss Pitney from the room, then returned to explain:

"That's a wholly good girl, but her fancy was too easily won by the fellow, 'Tom.' She knows better, now, and will have to know a whole lot more about the next man she allows to capture her affections. Now, I have another pair to show you. They're in cells. Come downstairs, please."

Through a corridor underneath the chief led his visitors, halting, at last, before a barred door of iron.

"Look through, and see who it is," smiled the police chief.

"Why, that's Walter C. Hodges, who sent us off on a pleasure trip in that doctored automobile!" exclaimed Jack.

"Yes; you're right," sighed the prisoner. "I've been cornered, and I've admitted it."

"But that fellow's daughter?" asked Jack, as the chief led them away.

"Hodges hasn't any daughter," replied Chief Ward. "We found the young woman, but we let her go. She is an idle, vain young woman. Hodges told her the same old story—a joke he was playing, and persuaded the young woman to go along and pretend to be his daughter. In payment he bought her the fine clothes she was wearing when you saw her. And now, here's some one you may like to see here!"

For a moment or two not a word was uttered as the submarine people found themselves gazing between bars at—Fred Radwin.

Radwin did not look depressed, but, on the contrary, jaunty and defiant.

"He's the one I'm best pleased of all to have," chuckled Chief Ward. "The four ruffians who attacked you boys, and held two of you in that deserted house before Benson led our party to the place, have confessed that they were acting for Radwin. And Hodges has confessed, too,

that Radwin employed him, and that, between them, they put the doctored axle in the auto."

While Chief Ward was speaking Fred Radwin turned pale.

"You didn't know all this until just this moment, did you, Radwin?" smiled the chief.

"Oh, you needn't think you can down me too easily," snarled the prisoner. "I have money to fight with."

"I know," nodded Ward. "You have a little over twenty thousand dollars, Radwin. I also know where the money is. An attorney acting for the chauffeur that was hurt so badly in the automobile smash-up has already started in to attach that money in a suit for damages by the chauffeur."

* * * * * * * * * *

It is time to turn from too disagreeable a picture. The four roughs first hired by Fred Radwin were sent to the penitentiary for a year each.

Hodges, in consideration of furnishing useful state's evidence, was sentenced to the penitentiary for two years and a half for his share in the automobile plot.

Radwin, for conspiracy in setting on the roughs, was sentenced to three years in the penitentiary; for his part in the automobile affair five years more were added. It will be a long

time, yet, ere Radwin will breathe the air as a free man.

John C. Rhinds vanished completely. True, one returned traveler reported having seen Rhinds at Nice, performing paltry services for American tourists in return for paltry "tips."

Mrs. Rhinds and her daughter, having decided to make the best of matters, are now living quietly and happily in a western town. They believe John C. to be dead.

The mystery of that torpedo has never been officially cleared. In naval circles, however, there is no doubt whatever felt as to the guilt of Rhinds and Radwin; but it is also felt that both have been suitably punished for their dastardly conduct. The three Rhinds torpedo boats were seized, under court orders, and sold to satisfy the claims of creditors of the Rhinds Company.

The chauffeur recovered twenty thousand dollars damages through the attachment of Radwin's funds and the subsequent civil suit. Besides which, after a few months, the chauffeur had practically recovered from his painful injuries.

David Pollard was out of hospital in three weeks. In twice that length of time he felt as well as ever.

Later on, the Pollard Submarine Boat Com-

pany received from the United States Government orders for eighteen torpedo boats in all, the "Benson" and "Hastings" included. One of the new ones, under this order, was named the "Somers." The Navy has accepted all three names, and the boats are now known in the service by these names. Later on the fortunes of the three submarine boys were materially increased by these sales.

One of the first pleasures experienced by David Pollard, after his discharge from hospital, was that of joining the rest of the Farnum party in dining with the members of the naval board and the gunboat's officers in the messroom of the "Oakland."

In the course of a little speech after dinner Captain Magowan referred in glowing terms to the splendid work of the submarine boys on that Lightning Cruise, and their success in being first to reach the derelict and torpedo it.

The president of the board was followed by Lieutenant Danvers, who, among other things said:

"The performances of Captain Benson and of his brother officers on the Pollard boats have, indeed, been wonderful. 'Wonderful' may not be quite the word, but, at this moment, I am so carried away with enthusiasm that I cannot cruise about for mere words." (Laughter and ap-

plause.) "The other day, a naval comrade, in talking with me about the performances of Jack Benson and his friends, told me he considered them to be wizards of the deep." (More applause.)

"But I took exception to my comrade's well-meant remarks. A wizard, as we understand one nowadays, is a mere pretender, a sleight-of-hand man—a jack at cards. I would offer a more fitting title—and in all sincerity—when I allude to Jack Benson, Hal Hastings and Eph Somers as the Young Kings of the Deep!" (Tremendous applause.)

* * * * * * * * * *

Here we will leave the submarine boys briefly, but we shall come upon them again in their next succeeding adventures—adventures that make a fitting climax, in the next volume, which will be entitled: "The Submarine Boys for the Flag; Or, Deeding Their Lives to Uncle Sam."

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